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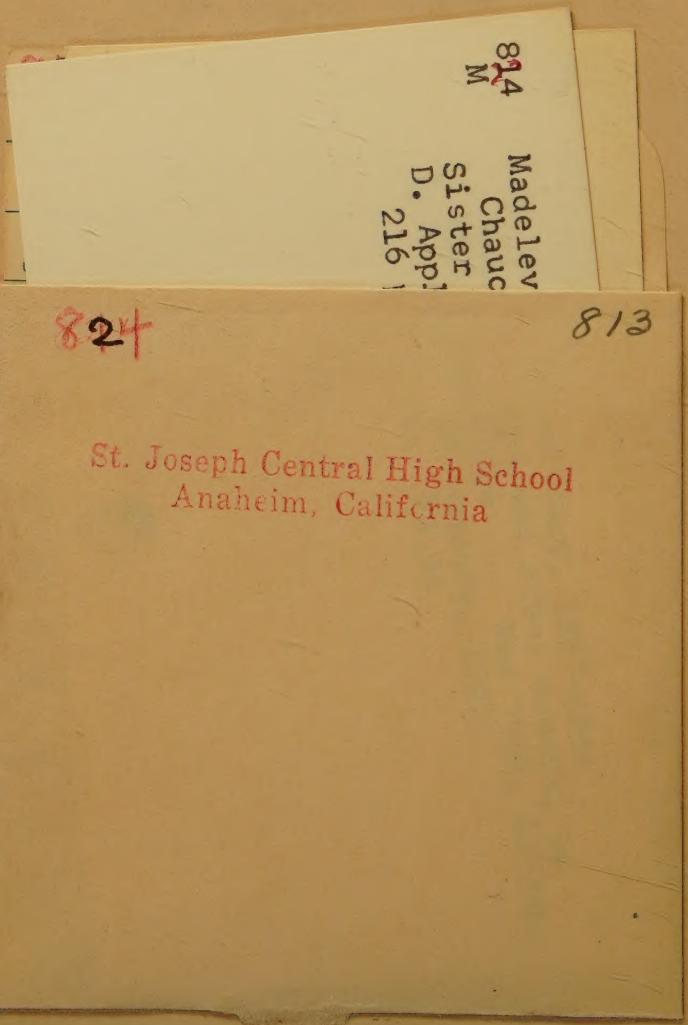
Chaucer's Nuns and other essay



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CHAUCER'S NUNS
AND OTHER ESSAYS

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CHAUCER'S NUNS
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BY

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TO

THE SISTERS OF
THE HOLY CROSS

THAT BELOVED "COMPANYE" WITH WHOM I "WENDE ON MY PILGRIMAGE" TO A FAIR, FAR CANTERBURY, I DEDICATE "CHAUCER'S NUNS"

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of the essays included in this volume have appeared already, in part at least, in the *Catholic World* and the *Notre Dame Scholastic* and are here reprinted with the kind permission of the editors.

FOREWORD

In the essays that Sister Mary Madeleva has here brought together, the fortunate finality of her discussion of Chaucer's nuns is so striking, that only by an effort can one resist devoting oneself exclusively to that essay. Yet Sister Madeleva has flashed her insight and her humor with equally remarkable results into other subjects. Edna St. Vincent Millay is here too; the disciplines of monastic living are given graciously up to the light, and also the waywardness of the familiar essay; and in the special field of nineteenth century literature more than one spirit is tracked to its origin, at least one form is followed to its source. Patmore and Francis Thompson and Chesterton, Gerard Hopkins, the Rossettis, and Alice Meynell are the personalities through which the currents are defined.

The range of interest is impressive. What

most readers, however, will value, and what will draw on to the last word even the casual reader who opens to the first page, is the fusion of the poet's gifts with those of the scholar here so richly manifested. All the facts, painstakingly assembled, come to life, touched with charm and beautiful significance. Unworldly gayety is the mood of mind and heart, but reality is the stuff it deals in. And reality can never be so hot or rough as to mar Sister Madeleva's mood.

One for all, take the irresistible essay on *Chaucer's Nuns*. For half a thousand years those luckless women have endured misinterpretation at the hands of critics who were men of honor and scholars of lively intelligence, but who, even when they were endowed with all other prerequisites, knew nothing of the inner life of religious communities for women. They had never been nuns. Even the best friend the Prioress ever had thought she was young and not so godly as she would like to have it thought and indeed liked to think herself. At length,

the five hundred years being now done, comes a student who is a scholar (and is therefore not out to edify), who has insight (and is, therefore, not boring), who is a nun and aware of the singular continuity of tradition in religious communities, and who though withdrawn from the world is not inhibited from yielding to the world the benefits of her retirement. She brings these leverages of her intellectual and spiritual and physical state to bear upon those sisters who long ago moved with others on to Canterbury 'the holy blisful martir for to seeke.' And the result is an essay which no library, no lover of Chaucer, no student of the religious life in communities can do without. It is an essay that few graduate students of creative research in literature will not want to read and mark, for it is a very significant manifestation of the spirit that imbues research.

The retiring habit of Sister Madeleva's life and her natural modesty have restrained her from writing her own preface. The pleasant

task of introducing her essays has fallen to me. My deserving is only in the brevity of my notice. For on the next page there are life and light.

B. H. LEHMAN

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CHAUCER'S NUNS

CHAUCER'S NUNS

I

THE Nuns in the *Canterbury Tales* are characters around whom a proverbially romantic interest and an unproverbial set of difficulties gather. They are, like their twenty-seven companions on the pilgrimage, typical individuals of their class, seen through the fixating medium of Chaucer's personality; seen by us through the less luminous distance of five hundred years. Criticism seems to have followed methods of microscopic analysis of them out of their habitual environment rather than telescopic synthesis of them in their environment. The problems they present are acutely psychological and prosaically human. Let us come to the matter in this wise.

Before one can attempt an understanding

either of Chaucer's Nuns or, indeed, of himself as artist in creating them, one must know in part the material on which he worked. A Nun, Religious, Sister—whichever name you wish—is not merely a woman in a "cloke ful fetis" and "ful semely pinched . . . wimple." nor even a woman upon whom the religious life has been superimposed, but a woman whose life has undergone a change more subtle and entirely spiritual than marriage but quite as real. The absolute proof of this statement is experience; the strongest ulterior proof is the word of one who has had this experience, corroborated by the whole world's recognition of the religious state. The forces by which this change is effected are two: the first, a mystical but most real relation between the soul and God; the second, the rules and customs and religious practices of the particular community in which the individual seeks to perfect that mystical relation. These determine almost entirely, apart from the personality of the individual, the manners, the deportment,

the whole external aspect of the religious. So apparent are the effects that religious communities recognize among themselves their outstanding qualities and characterize one another by them. The point I wish to make clear is this: Chaucer in depicting the Nuns was not dealing merely with women wearing a particular and conspicuous costume, symbolic of religion, but women whose whole selves had undergone a subtle change by reason of the two influences just named. He was representing the visible effects of a spiritual life of which he had no experimental or vicarious knowledge. That fact should be italicized in considering critically his accomplished task. And—which is almost more important—the Nuns themselves, to be interpreted at all, must be interpreted in relation to their Rule, their customs, and the community prayers by which their entire lives were regulated. Such an interpretation of Chaucer's Nuns this paper proposes to make.

The Prioress and her chaplain were, accord-

ing to Chaucer's allusion, members of the convent at Stratford at Bow, a Benedictine abbey of note and prominence in the fourteenth century. This means that they were living under the *Rule of St. Benedict,* that their exterior conduct was regulated by the norm and pattern laid down in it, and that their interior or spiritual life reflected its spirit as it fed and thrived upon the religious practices prescribed in it. Chief among these practices was the chanting of the Divine Office to which we shall come presently. What their exterior was we learn from the *Prologue;* what their interior life must have been we can guess from the spirituality of their own prologues and stories proper, unconscious as their breathing and quite as natural. Now for an interpretation of these through the *Rule of St. Benedict.*

Logically we begin with the Prioress as she appears in the *Prologue,* and we look to her holy rule rather than to any other source book for direction upon her smiling, her oath, her name, her singing, her table manners—well

nigh threadbare with much quoting—her charity, her pets, her cloak and beads and brooch, her age—mind you—and her chaplain; everything in fact except her face, which is after Chaucer's best conventional pattern.

To interpret her "smyling . . . ful simple and coy" I would go sooner to the *Rule of St. Benedict,* with which Chaucer was easily familiar, than to the pastorelle of the fourteenth century where Professor Lowes hunts the phrase with such characteristic thoroughness.[1]

For in the Northern Verse version one reads:

> *A priores hir fast sal breke,*
> *And silence, when scho suld not speke,*
> *To myrth hir gestes in that scho may.*[2]

The prose translated by D. Oswald Hunter Blair corresponds: "When, therefore, a guest is announced, let him be met by the Superior

1 J. L. Lowes, "Simple and Coy," *Anglia,* XXXIII, 440-451.
2 *Three Middle English Versions of the Rule of St. Benedict,* Chap. li, 103.

or the brethren, with all due charity. . . . When the guests have been received . . . let the Superior, or anyone he may appoint, sit with them. . . . The Superior may break his fast for the sake of the guest. . . . Let the Abbot pour water on the hands of the guests; and himself as well as the whole community, wash their feet." Chapter LIII.

Considering that this is the spirit of the rule under which the Prioress had enlisted, one feels that her smiling was the minimum of hospitality which she must have felt for strangers, at home or abroad, and one understands her congeniality and cheer later remarked as a part of the same spirit.

Her lovely and romantic name is a sure target for remark. It is exactly what a little girl would be like to call her favorite doll. How did Chaucer hit upon it? By much the same process, I should think, as leads any author to prefer Anita to Hannah, or Eloise to Ella, as the name of his heroine. There is no written rule, so far as I know, for the giving

of names in religious communities. It is a matter determined by custom, which is a form of written or unwritten practice in all communities, almost as binding as the rule and harder to depart from. In regard to names, three customs prevail. In some communities, the Sisters retain their family names, and Mary or Elizabeth or Susan Eglantine becomes in religion Madame Eglantine. This is not, I think, the practice of the Benedictines. Other communities, usually small ones, allow the prospective Sister to choose her own name. In most large communities the subject has no actual choice; she or her friends may express a wish in the matter, which may or may not be considered. However, the name given is either the whole or a part of a saint's name or bears traditions of sanctity. Magdalen is a familiar example, taken not from Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, but from Magdala, her home. What clouds of sanctity trail from Madame Eglantine's name are lost in the mists of a hagiography more familiar to Chaucer

than to me. At all events its chances of being "self-chosen" are two to one, and if self-chosen, the chooser was Chaucer. That his choice was a canny one, I admit, with the canniness of a journalist.

I have thought it unnecessary to speak of Madame Eglantine's negative oath, in view of Professor Hales' and Professor Lowes' articles on it.[3] The singing of the divine service contains two interesting bits of unexhausted inference. A word first in regard to the Office itself may be illuminating. Aside from the Mass, the Divine Office, or "service" as Chaucer calls it, is the most solemn liturgical prayer of the Church. It is composed chiefly of the psalms, arranged in seven parts with prose prayers and hymns appropriately introduced. The seven parts are: Matins and Lauds which are said late in the afternoon (by anticipation) or in cloistered orders, shortly after midnight; Prime, Tierce, Sexte,

[3] J. W. Hales, "Chaucer's Prioress's 'Greatest Oath,'" *The Athenæum*, Jan. 10, 1891, 54. J. L. Lowes, "The Prioress's Oath," *Romanic Review*, V. No. 4.

and None recited during the morning hours, and Vespers in the afternoon or evening, followed by a postlude, so to say, called Compline. The Office is in Latin and is chanted and intoned, "entuned in the nose," in various keys. It is recited daily by all priests and chanted in choir in such monastic orders as the Benedictines, the Carthusians, the Carmelites. A shorter form of the same solemn prayer of the Church, known as the *Little Office, Little Hours of the Blessed Virgin,* or *Psalter,* was used during the Middle Ages by the laity and is still used by all religious orders that do not recite the Divine Office. The Office is chanted by the community together or "in choir," ordinarily, but when religious are on journeys they recite their office "privately"; that is, they read it to themselves. *The Rule of St. Benedict,* Chapter XIX, says on this subject: "Loke ye do yure seruise als ye stode by-fore god almihti. And lokis, when ye sing, that yure herte acorde wid yure voice; than sing ye riht." And, in truth, it is a matter

of conscience with every religious to intone the Office "ful semely," as it is the most important of all vocal prayers.

Here are the bare facts; now for their two promised inferences. First, Chaucer must have been familiar with the Divine Office, so familiar that he knew how it should be said. That he knew even better the Little Office will appear in the discussion of the *Prioress's Prologue* later. Second, he must have been at some convent for only there could he have heard the "service divyne entuned." His statement regarding the Prioress in this connection evidently refers to her life in the cloister; no religious recites the Office aloud when traveling. One might go further and infer that through business or ties of kinship [4] he must have been well acquainted with some community; a stranger or a casual visitor does not ordinarily hear the religious chanting the Office, or if he does, he is not able to interpret it as Chaucer does. This inference reinforces

[4] Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*, I, 100.

a theory offered later as to the possible unwritten source of the Nuns' stories.

One comes rather resentfully to the table manners of the Prioress upon which so much trivial comment has been expended. I will connect her "cloke . . . ful fetis" with her conduct at table, as having no slight bearing upon it. The *Rule,* Chapter LVI, makes this provision for clothing:

> *In comun places for alkins note*
> *Sufficis a kirtil and a cote;*
> *And mantels sal thai haue certayn,*
> *In winter dubil, in somer playne. . . .*
>
> *And when thai sal went in cuntre,* [*i.e. on a journey*]
> *Thair clething sal mor honest be; . . .*
>
> *And home agayn when thai cum eft,*
> *Then sal thai were slik os thai left.*

Here is explicit provision for the "fetis" cloak, and a homely, human reason for the Prioress's carefulness at table. She was

wearing not only a clean, but a new habit, which she would be expected to give up on her return to her convent. Is it any wonder that she was so effectively solicitous "that no drope ne fille up-on hir brest"? I can well understand how Chaucer might have misinterpreted such apparent over-daintiness, and how critics have found it affected, even "a little ridiculous." [5] But none of them ever wore a religious habit, nor had the least idea of what real distress a Sister feels at getting a spot on her habit, especially at table. Her habit is holy to her: "a spot without is a spot within" is among the most venerable of community proverbs, and St. Bernard's "I love poverty always but dirt never" is applied to clothing almost more than to anything else in religious life. This highly cultivated antipathy for dirt accounts more reasonably for the dainty details of Madame Eglantine's conduct at table than affectation or an aping of the manners of the world, the "chere of court," two things

[5] R. K. Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer,* 190.

that are anathema in the spirit of every religious community.

One other determining element in the Prioress's character that even Chaucer might not have been able to account exactly for but which would manifest itself surely at table was her spirit of mortification. The veriest novice knows that mortification is the mainspring of religious life and bodily mortification is practiced in some measure by all religious at table. St. Benedict says: "Let two dishes, then, suffice for all the brethren. . . . For there is nothing so adverse to a Christian as gluttony, according to the words of our Lord: 'See that your hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting.'" Chapter XXXIX. This may suggest a new meaning to the line, "ful semely after hir mete she raughte."

The "rosted flesh, and milk and wastelbreed" for the "smale hondes" is an open extravagance except that these were gathered from the table after the meal was over. And this custom is as old as St. Francis and his

brother Wolf, I suspect. Personally, I see every day of my life a Sister with as "tendre a herte" as the Prioress—an old Sister, by the way—gathering choice bits of meat and creamy milk for our excellent mouser, Fluff, and scattering "wastel breed" to the little warblers and finches around our door. I should say that this good Sister's heart goes out to the canine world to such degree that more than one "hounde" greets her with barks of joy. One would have to live in a convent to appreciate fully what Chaucer has really done in these sixty lines of the *Prologue*.

The well-pinched wimple is one of the most interesting details of the Prioress's dress. No one who has ever seen a Benedictine habit can miss its significance. The wimple or collar of this habit is as typical as the coronet of the Sister of Charity, if not quite so architectural. It is of white linen, accordion plaited or "pinched" to fit closely around the neck and over the shoulders in such manner that each plait forms a circle and the whole wimple is a

series of concentric circles. The mystery of its achievement might well defy the feminine mind; its neat and supple tidiness would scarce escape even the masculine eye. Small wonder, then, that Chaucer directs the attention of five hundred years to the well-pinched wimple. It was a feature of the Nun's habit to elicit admiration from the least observant. Suggestions of vanity on the Nun's part arise, it seems to me, from a lack of understanding of a Sister's attitude toward her habit. It is a matter not of vanity but of duty to her to wear it modestly and becomingly as the uniform of her high vocation. Here, again, a secular point of view fails to catch the chief significance of things that may have deceived even Chaucer.

On the subject of the "smal coral . . . peire of bedes" one might expand into a brief history of the origin and use of prayer beads. Let it suffice here to say that since the thirteenth century such beads have been in common use among religious and lay persons alike. At that time they were called Paternosters,

from the prayer most often said on them. Their manufacturers, Paternosterers, were a recognized craft guild. Stephen Boyleau in his *Livres des Métiers* gives full details of the four guilds of "Patenotriers" in Paris in 1268. Paternoster Row in London commemorates the gathering place of a group of these same craftsmen. The prayer beads that the Prioress carried were the work of medieval handicraft rather than twentieth-century machines, an explanation quite sufficient to account for their exquisite beauty. Only one who has seen the large variety of beads in common use among Catholics can appreciate how lovely this particular pair must have been. The spirit of poverty would forbid a Sister to-day to use anything so elaborate, but in the days when things were not merely useful but beautiful, this pair of beads may not have been such an extravagance.

The suggestion that even Chaucer had in mind an ambiguous meaning for the motto, "Amor vincit omnia" or an eye to its cheaper

journalistic value seems to me unworthy and inconsistent with his attitude of pronounced respect toward the Prioress. As a matter of fact, this is one of the commonest of epigrams among religious, and I know that one could find it worked in cross stitch, or painted in all the varying forms of realistic and conventional art and framed as a motto in dozens of our convents in our very unmystical and unmedieval United States to-day. I have no doubt that Chaucer himself had seen it so in some convent parlor, possibly in Norfolk where a ring bearing the same inscription has been unearthed and where there was a large Benedictine convent in Chaucer's time.[6] It is, in three words, the most typical motto that could have been engraved upon the brooch.

The "broche" itself, hanging from the beads, was undoubtedly a medal, one of the commonest sacramentals in the Catholic Church. It is a small object, much like a locket, bearing engraving and inscriptions of a religious nature.

[6] *Life Records of Chaucer,* III (2d series), 135.

813.

In itself it has no virtue; its value lies in the fact that it reminds the owner or bearer of some truth of religion and so inspires him to virtue. Medals are of unlimited variety and number and purpose. They are made of gold, silver, plated or oxidized metals, cloisonné, bronze, or cheaper substances and range from simple crudeness to exquisite beauty in workmanship and design. The Prioress's "broche" is a good, but not an over-elaborate, medal.

So much for the accidents of Madame Eglantine's exterior. The discussion of them has been neither scholarly nor pretentious; it has regarded them simply in the light of the Prioress's Rule, under a modified form of which the writer herself lives, and in that light has indicated details that the most luminous of old manuscripts might not shed upon them.

One other matter remains before leaving the *Prologue:* the question of the gentle Madame's age. By what evidence or inference critics conclude that the Prioress was young I do not know. Professor Lowes, referring to the

touches of artistry in the details of description, remarks on "the skill with which they suggest still youthful flesh and blood behind the well pinched wimple. Not only in his account of the amiable foibles of the Prioress," he continues, "but in his choice of words and phrases, Chaucer suggests the delightfully imperfect submergence of the woman in the nun." Which implies, if it does not state, that she was, more than probably, young. The emphasis, I understand, is upon the nice perfection of Chaucer's workmanship and art. But from that very point of view I believe that there is a failure to appreciate his greater perfection. He has given us some one much harder to paint with his brush of words than a young Nun in whom the young woman is as yet imperfectly submerged. That task might have tempted his immaturity. But here is his picture of a woman a decade or more beyond middle age (my opinion) sweetened and spiritually transformed by the rules and religious practices of her choice, who can be in the world without

being of it, gracious without affectation, and friendly without boldness. That she combines the wisdom of the serpent with the simplicity of the dove one realizes from her exquisite rebuke to the shipman when, in telling her story, she has occasion to refer to an abbot, and remembering his "daun John" she puts in her artless aside, "a holy man, as monkes been, or elles oughten be." [7] Personally, I think that a younger Nun would have expressed open resentment or have kept silence on the subject; only a mature woman of experience and courage and tact could have made and used an opportunity for a well-earned reprimand with such casual sweetness. She is a woman, evidently, who has taken to heart the Pauline lesson of becoming all things to all men, and learned it well. It is one of the ideals of all religious life, and it seems more natural to think that her "greet disport" and "amiable port" are the outcome of it rather than "com-

[7] K. Bregy, "The Inclusiveness of Chaucer," *Catholic World*, June, 1922.

pounded" like "her character," as Professor Root says, "of many affectations." [8] The cheerful, dignified, kindly woman of fifty years, perhaps, is what the religious reads out of Chaucer's Prioress, and she is decidedly a more complex character to penetrate and portray than a Sister with the natural gayety and exuberance of youth still about her.

One turns to the *Rule of St. Benedict* for some stipulation as to the age requirement for the office of Prioress. In the Northern Prose Version, Chapter LI, one reads, "The yung salle onur thalde, and the alde salle lufe the yunge. Nane sal calle othir by thaire name, but the priures sal calle thaim hir 'sistirs.' The abbesse, for sho es in godis stede, sal be callid 'dame.' " This might imply, from its context, seniority; but in the Caxton abstract one finds: "Such (Superiors) owe not to be chosen therto by their age, but for their wertuous lyuing and wysdom, chastyte and sobre dealying, and also for their pyte and mercy, the whyche

[8] R. K. Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer,* 190.

they muste vse in all their dedys." Then follows a list of other qualities that are the very reverse of youthful virtues; prudence, for example, compassion, patience, industry, great and all-embracing charity. We are not to suppose that the Prioress or any other Superior ever embodied them all, but one looks for and finds more of these requisites in an old than in a young person.

Other proofs of the Prioress's age are not difficult to find, proofs almost absurd in their homeliness. Most religious rules or customs even to-day forbid the keeping of pet animals. One remembers the terse injunction in the *Ancren Riwle,* "Ye shall not possess any beast, my dear Sisters, except only a cat." That abuses to this regulation grew up Grossetest's comments leave no small doubt; a fact of more significance to us, however, is that when an exception to the rule is made, it is ordinarily in favor of an older religious. A Sister of fifty or sixty can have a bird or a dog or a cat with propriety; a Sister of thirty would scarcely

think of such a thing. So do the "smale houndes" betray the age of their gentle mistress.

This point may be too trivial to be of value; if it will serve no other purpose we may "use it for our mirth, yea, for our laughter." Chaucer says the Prioress

> *was so charitable and so pitous,*
> *She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous*
> *Caught in a trappe.*

Human nature in respect to mice has not changed since those days. No young Nuns that I have ever met, and they are many, would have been moved to tears at such a sight; most of them would certainly have screamed or have wanted to.

So the age of the Prioress rests, like Chaucer's own, an unknown quantity of continued speculation. For the unchivalry of exposing these evidences of her advanced age, we offer the high security of the maiden on the Grecian urn, "she cannot fade."

The presence of the Prioress's companion is in strict accord with apostolic tradition and is followed closely in most religious communities. One is startled to hear her spoken of as a chaplain, a name ordinarily applied to priests. An article published by Dr. Furnivall in the *Academy* some years ago clears up the difficulty by explaining that the nun-chaplain is a regular office in Benedictine convents.[9] And so the last difficulty in the *Prologue* disappears.

One quotation more from the Benedictine Rule will be of service in completing what I have pompously called a telescopic synthesis of Chaucer's Nuns in their environment. It is the rule on journeys. "Let the brethren who are about to be sent on a journey commend themselves to the prayers of all the brethren and of the Abbot, and at the last prayer of the Work of God let a commemoration always be made of the absent. (A custom still practiced

[9] F. J. Furnivall, "Chaucer's Prioress's Nun-Chaplain," *Academy*, May 22, 1880, 385. Also in *Anglia*, IV, 238.

in communities.) Let the brethren that return from a journey, on the very day that they come back, lie prostrate on the floor of the Oratory at all the Canonical Hours . . . and beg the prayers of all on account of their transgressions, in case they should perchance upon the way have seen or heard anything harmful, or fallen into idle talk. And let no one presume to relate to another what he may have seen or heard outside the Monastery; for thence arise manifold evils." Chapter LXVII. This completes the portion of the Rule by which the Nuns in Chaucer and their conduct on the way to Canterbury should be judged. It is quoted to give some idea of the spirit in which a Prioress and her companion would undertake such a journey and what would be their responsibilities in regard to it. Nothing but a very urgent spiritual quest could have induced them to leave their cloister and join so worldly and public an excursion. It may be urged that the Rule was subject to many abuses, as no doubt it was, but nowhere does Chaucer give

us any reason to think that his Nuns were of a tramp or derelict order; the reverence and courtesy of which he specifically says they were worthy is proof enough that he was depicting the typical "ninety-nine who need not penance" Sister rather than the well advertised one who does.

At the beginning of this study it was suggested that a fruitful and nearer-to-truth study of Chaucer's Nuns could be made by viewing them in the light of their rules, customs, and community prayers than by the measure of a social life that they had voluntarily abandoned. The Nuns as they appear in the *Prologue* are chiefly viewed from the outside; one sees them here as they have been molded and fashioned by their rule. That rule has been applied to every detail of their description and in most cases has yielded a more human, if not a different, understanding of them. Putting these parts together and viewing the united whole through the kindly telescope of our common human nature we get

in the Nuns of Chaucer's *Prologue* more lovable characters and immeasurably finer creations than critical analysis shows us.

II

Thus far we have considered the Nuns as a psychological and spiritual product of the rules and customs of St. Benedict; in the *Prologues* to their *Tales* and their stories proper we will regard them under the influence of their daily prayers. As has already been explained, all the older religious orders recite the Divine Office every day and have done so since the beginning of monasticism. They live in the spirit of this solemn, liturgical prayer with which their day's labor is punctuated and their night's rest broken. Beside the Holy Mass, it is the great thing for which they live. This may seem an extravagant saying to the secular world, but one need only go to a cloistered convent to find it verified. The lives of the religious become colored by it; their very

speech takes on the phraseology of the psalms and hymns that make up their daily converse with the Most High.

To point the truth of this, one turns to the two Prologues, spoken by the Nuns. The Prioress begins, "O Lord, our Lord" which critics have had no difficulty in identifying with the opening verse of the Eighth Psalm. Scholars have also recognized the *Salve Regina,* the *Memento Rerum Conditor,* and other hymns of the Church in passages of the two Prologues. But they have not seen that the two Nuns are merely paraphrasing in them the parts of the morning Office in which the Blessed Virgin is invoked; or, in other words, speaking the language of praise most natural to them. Just here is an interesting detail. Chaucer makes his excerpts, not from the Divine, but from the Little Office. The reason is easy. He was more familiar with it and knew that all the psalms and prayers it contained were included in the longer Office which the Nuns actually said.

At the risk of being tiresome I will make the parallel. The first seven lines of the *Prioress's Prologue* are a paraphrase of the first three verses of the opening psalm of Matins. Then follows seven lines in which the Prioress combines an antiphon of Matins, "Vouchsafe that I may praise thee, O sacred Virgin; give me strength against my enemies," with her own particular task of story telling and her intention in it. This matter of expressing one's intention in the performance of every act, no matter how trivial or indifferent in nature, is also a fundamental practice of religious life and is based on St. Paul's injunction "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all for the honor and glory of God." As one progresses in her task, she renews her intention in order to increase her merit in the performance of it. This explains the renewed ejaculations of both Nuns as they proceed with their stories. This may sound like pure fiction, but again I refer to any and all religious communities in the world for corroboration, or to

The Imitation of Christ for that matter. Even pupils in Catholic schools are taught and exhorted to offer all their actions to God directly or through the medium of the Blessed Virgin or the Saints, and such an offering is part of every well-instructed Catholic's morning prayer.

To return to the Prologue: the third stanza, beginning "O moder mayde!" is a free form of the third long antiphon in Lauds, the part of the Office following Matins—"In the bush which Moses saw burning without being consumed, we acknowledge the preservation of thy admirable virginity. O holy Mother of God, make intercession for us." The fourth stanza goes back to the prayer and Absolution of Matins which are: "O holy and immaculate virginity, I know not with what praises to extol thee," and, "By the prayers and merits of the blessed Mary ever Virgin and of all the Saints, may the Lord bring us to the kingdom of heaven." The fifth stanza seems to be the Prioress's renewal of her intention, in her own

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words, and is a perfect reflection of numberless such daily improvised prayers.

The Prologue of the Second Nun's Tale takes us back to the *Rule of St. Benedict* where one reads many very positive injunctions against idleness, a vice scrupulously avoided by the large majority of religious, all rumors of lazy monks and idle nuns to the contrary notwithstanding. St. Benedict says: "Idilnesse is the enmye of the soule, wherfore lyke as the couent ben occupyed certeyn howres aboute the seruice of god, soo certeyn other howres ben thei occupyed in redyng and studyeng of heuenly thynges, and in laboures wyth theyr body." Whatever convention Chaucer was following in this mild invective against idleness as a proem to the Nun's story [10] he is, consciously or unconsciously, making her live according to her rule and supplying her with legitimate and ordered occupation against the evil of idleness, "reading . . . of heavenly things."

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10 Carleton Brown, "Prologue of Chaucer's 'Life of St. Cecile,'" *Modern Philology*, IX, 1-16.

High School

As to the Invocation, I like to find its sources in the Little Office as much as in Macrobius and Dante, sufficient as they may be to account for it.[11] The opening represents the nun's expression of her intention, without which no religious ever undertakes any work of importance. It follows in spirit and loosely in word, the *Sacrosanctæ* and the *Invitatory* of Matins. The hymn *Quem terra, pontus, sidera* which follows immediately in the Office is paraphrased, as Professor Lowes has pointed out in the next twenty lines of the Invocation.

By applying the test of the Little Office to the two Prologues of the Nuns' Tales, we find that they embody in spirit, frequently in word, the opening and closing prayers (*Salve Regina*) of Matins and Lauds; that is, the prayer with which the Nuns' daily life began. The most pertinent and significant point in this study is, I think, the recognition of the part the Office played in the lives of the Prioress and

[11] J. L. Lowes, "The Second Nun's Prologue, Alonus and Macrobius," *Modern Philology,* XV, 193.

her companion and the natural overflow of its most beautiful and fitting parts into their more worldly speech. Chaucer may not have known just how deep this undercurrent was; in which case the more glory to him for representing what he observed but did not understand was an outward expression of the very essence of religious devotion.

III

The Nuns' stories themselves have been carefully traced by any number of Chaucerian scholars.[12] What suggestions are here volunteered arise from homely experience rather than from scholarly research and may be worth nothing. It is abundantly evident to any reader, to the religious most of all, that Chaucer knew personally, even intimately,

[12] Carleton Brown, "Chaucer's Prioresses Tale and Its Analogues," *Publications, Modern Language Association,* XXI, 486; "Chaucer's 'Litel Clergeon,'" *Modern Philology,* III, 467; "Chaucer and the Hours of the Blessed Virgin," *Modern Language Notes,* XXX, 231; J. L. Lowes, "The 'Corones Two' of the Second Nun's Tale," *Publications, Modern Language Association,* XXVI, 315; F. Tupper, "Chaucer and the Prymer," *Modern Language Notes,* XXX, 9.

Sisters; not only that, he had talked with many of them, I should say; had listened to their stories, begun and ended and interspersed with pious ejaculations. Whether he got the text of the little clergeon from Gautier, or Cæsarius, or the Paris Beggar Boy, or the unknown X is a point on which research may ponder futilely; but that he knew the story from the lips of some old Nun before he knew any of these would not surprise me in the least. Such a source may be the missing manuscript X, of the existence of which Professor Carleton Brown seems to have no doubt. It is much easier for me to trace the "maternal touches of human motherhood" in that inspired passage,

My litel child, now wol I fecche thee
Whan that the greyn is fro thy tonge
y-take;
Be nat agast, I wol thee nat forsake!

referred to in "Some Old French Miracles of Our Lady" [13] to a real, flesh-and-blood Sister,

[13] W. M. Hart, *The C. M. Gayley Anniversary Papers, U. of C. Publications in Modern Philology,* XI.

a Benedictine no doubt, than to the cold and fragmentary offerings of age-old ink and paper. For the potential but foregone motherhood of the consecrated virgin has always found outlets in such expressions of ardent, spiritualized tenderness. Cold print cannot convince one of this fact but a ten minutes' conversation with any Sister who has grown old gracefully in religion will do it without fail. This is, of course, more suggestive than scholarly, but may lead to new clues and methods of approach.

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I like to think of Chaucer, the child, a "little clergeon" himself perhaps, or later "his felaw" listening again and again to the stories of the childish singer of the *Alma Redemptoris,* of the "corones two," and of the martyrdom of St. Cecilia from the lips of some dear old Sister, an aunt or a grandaunt, perhaps—who knows? They are just the stories that Sisters are telling to the smaller and even the grown children in Catholic boarding schools the world over to-day; they are the stories that the children

clamor for again and again and never tire of hearing. It was there that I heard them before I knew of Geoffrey Chaucer; and the Nuns' tales took me back, not to manuscripts, nor sermons, nor even to the lives of the saints, but to the stories told by Sisters in our recreations at boarding school. There are seventeen most impressionable years of Chaucer's life unexplored. One need suppose that only once during that time he visited a convent and the rest is easy. No child ever ventured in wide-eyed awe into a convent corridor but some motherly old Nun broke through the barrier of his shyness with a battery of just such stories.

To return to the little clergeon, the lines

"And eek also, wher-as he saw th'image
Of Cristes moder, hadde he in usage,
As him was taught, to knele adoun and seye
His Ave Marie, *as he goth by the weye"*

are like a casual remark upon a custom still common in all convent schools and Catholic churches to-day. A host of "little clergeons"

can be seen before statues of Our Lady saying their Ave Maria now as in the days of the small singer of "Asie."

The *Alma Redemptoris* of his devotion I am inclined to believe was that of Hermanus Contractus (Alma Redemptoris quæ pervia cœli) because of its greater familiarity among the Catholic laity; more especially because it is sung during Advent, the time precisely when the little lad heard and learned it.

This one other unscholarly suggestion upon the Prioress's Tale may or may not be of value. From my first reading of the story many years ago, I have always taken the *greyn* laid upon the child's tongue to mean the consecrated Host. This, I realize, is a perfectly private interpretation on which no fact can be based. But, investigating, I have found this much to substantiate my strange notion. *Greyn* is defined by *Bradley and Murray* to have meant in early usage "a small part." The Host is often called a "particle" and is given in the dictionary as one meaning for

"particle." So, without any twisting of definitions, the *greyn* could mean the Holy Communion. The sequel is interesting. In the life of St. Stanislaus Kostka, a sixteenth century copy of the little clergeon, we read that Our Lady appeared to him several times, last of all at his death, accompanied by angels, who in times of persecution twice brought him Holy Communion.[14]

One other meaning for *greyn* in *Bradley and Murray* ought to be considered here. It was a common word for bead, prayer bead. As such beads were most commonly used to count Ave Marias upon, it seems evident that if the *greyn* was not the consecrated particle, it must have been the bead of the angelic salutation.

A suggestion regarding St. Cecilia's angel and another about the crown and then this paper will have an end. Nowhere have I found an explanation of Cecilia's speech, "I have an angel which loveth me," but it is not far to

[14] C. C. Martindale, *Christ's Cadets*, 74, 75, 82, 95.

seek. It refers quite evidently to the Catholic teaching of a guardian angel, based upon the first verse of Psalm 91: "He hath given his angels charge over thee"; and the words of Christ, spoken of little children: "Their angels see the face of my Father Who is in heaven."

The symbolism of the colors, red and white, has been most carefully worked out by Professor Lowes in the article on the two crowns to which I have already referred. These references to the Canticle of Canticles merely emphasize his point: "My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands"; V-10; and everywhere in this same mystical song lilies are spoken of as the abiding place of the most chaste and rapturous of all lovers.

IV

This long hunt amid the quiet places of the Benedictine Rule and Office for rare Chaucerian birds is over. How far it has fright-

ened from their coverts shy and unexpected fledglings I cannot guess. If it has served so much as to open up to the scholar new woods and fields in which to range, it will have been a "moste dere" chase.

THE PROSE OF FRANCIS THOMPSON

THE PROSE OF FRANCIS THOMPSON

ITS CONTENT AND STYLE AS TRANSITIONAL FROM PATMORE TO CHESTERTON

I

IN these days when the present is held personally accountable for what the past has been or the future may be, studies in transition are inevitable. This paper purposes to discuss the prose of Francis Thompson as transitional from Coventry Patmore to Gilbert K. Chesterton. The subject of Thompson's prose itself has not yet been treated beyond the limits of one magazine article [1] and three or four scattered sentences dropped into articles on his

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1 A. J. Hogan, "The Master of Prose," *Catholic World*, 102, 184-193. Nov., 1915.

poetry. So, preliminary to the discussion proper and preparatory to it, a quick survey of this prose is necessary.

II

To speak of the prose of Francis Thompson sounds almost paradoxical, so nearly has the name of this shy genius become a synonym for quintessential song. Yet "Coventry Patmore thought his prose better than his poetry, and his talk better than either."[2] He says himself, in his essay on Shakespeare's prose, "It might almost be erected into a rule that a great poet is, if he please, also a master of prose." That Francis Thompson was such a master is a fact that has been neglected rather than denied. His prose was candidly to himself as the blear-eyed Lia to the beautiful Rachel, but he accepted it honorably, nevertheless, and through it has become the parent of

[2] K. Tynan, "Francis Thompson," *Living Age*, 298: 630-632. Sept. 7, 1918. Also B. Champney, *Coventry Patmore*, 2, 133.

some of his sturdiest contributions to nineteenth century literature.

Briefly, the prose of Thompson comprises three volumes, the *Life of St. Ignatius,* the *Life of St. John Baptist de la Salle,* and a book of essays which includes "Shelley" and his highly ascetic "Health and Holiness." Not a week's reading in all, if one were to judge by bulk, but of a quality and substance to give one pause. To consider that style and content in their relations to two quite singular writers of the late nineties, Patmore and Chesterton, it will be best to let the work fall into these general groups: the literary criticisms, the biographies, and the purely personal essays.

What have been called literary criticisms were originally "stories" for the literary sections of the magazines for which Thompson wrote; *Merry England,* the *Academy,* and the *Athenæum,* particularly. Their subjects are as interesting or uninteresting as a card catalogue—Bacon, Coleridge, Crashaw, Dante, Emerson, Milton, Pope, Thomas De Quincey,

et cetera. Their average length, to apply the tape measure, does not exceed six pages. But after having shrunk and warped themselves into the stunted limits of newspaper "space," see how they have kept their fine thoughts free. Let the paper on Coleridge serve as example. These things may have been better thought but they have not found their way to us in better words.

"The style of Coleridge is bare of manner, . . . it is, in the Roman sense of *merum,* mere style; style unalloyed and integral. Therefore, poets diverse beyond other men in their appreciation of poets, have agreed with a single mind in their estimate of this poet; no artist could refrain his homage to the miracle of such utterance. . . . He takes words which have had the life used out of them by the common cry of poets; puts them into relation, and they rise up like his own dead mariners, wonderful with a supernatural animation." His sentences are compact almost to explosiveness and, to borrow a figure from Santayana, burst into

a thousand suggestions. Take such a sentence as this in which he protests against the charge of affectation that critics hurled at Coleridge:

"Wordsworth wrote simple diction, and his simplicity was termed affected; Shelley gorgeous diction, and his gorgeousness was affected; Keats rich diction, and his richness was affected; Tennyson cunning diction, and his cunning was affected; Browning rugged diction, and his ruggedness was affected. Why Coleridge was called affected passes the wit of man. . . . If this old shoe were not thrown at the wedding of every poet with the Muse, what would become of our ancient English customs?" He calls the roll of the poets who have admitted the generative influence of Coleridge, names on the fingers of one hand the poems by which his place in letters is secured, and with judicious calmness dismisses the minor poems as "minor, indeed." Through the days of Dorothy Wordsworth and those later times of which the only record is rather unpleasant now to read, his panoramic criticism

travels, miniature, appraising, clear, to the final figure of "the poet submerged and feebly struggling in opium-darkened oceans of German philosophy. . . . And over that wreck," he says, "most piteous and terrible in all our literary history, shines, and will shine for ever, the five-pointed star of his glorious youth; those poor five resplendent poems, for which he paid the devil's price of a desolated life and unthinkably blasted powers." One feels that this is a style which would honor lesser subjects and is worthy even of Coleridge, that it is criticism beautiful in its rightness and because of it.

The essay on Milton bears it easy company. One might say in passing that the opening paragraphs are models in the fine art of epitomizing in a few packed sentences the carefully authenticated findings of many months' research. Every page of Thompson's prose bears traces of his student mind and student habits, of his detailed and particular knowledge. This calm telescoping of the unprotesting Milton into a sentence is an example.

"An extraordinary melange of Hebrew and heathen, this Milton—something of Job, something of Æschylus, not a little of Plato, with an infusion of the Ancient Fathers to 'make the gruel thick and slab.' " This single casual sentence is another: " 'Comus' was indeed a gift from the Greeks; yet even in 'Il Penseroso' one comes across a fragment from St. Athanasius." A further criticism of "Comus" yields this fine comparison and finer contrast:

"In 'Comus' alone can we justly compare him with his great dramatic predecessor, and there we find this essential contrast in the matter of diction; the words of Shakespeare seem to flower from the line, while the Miltonic line is inlaid with rich and chosen words."

Of "Paradise Lost" he says apocalyptically:

"It widened the known bounds of the sublime." The epigram is a subject for meditation which, if properly made, must widen one's understanding of the epic. In comment on

Milton in his home with his daughters he says: "Poor little 'undutiful' daughters! Fathers had terrible conceptions of duty in those days. Did any one ever want to know Milton? Did any one ever not want to know Shakespeare?"

The essay ends with this expressed regret that most lovers of Milton feel but cannot say with quite such worthiness: "The most inspired artificer in poetry, he lacked, perhaps (or was it a perfecting fault?) a little poetic detachment from his artistic riches. He could not forget, nor can we forget, that he was Milton. And, after all, one must confess it was worth remembering. An art so conscious and consummate was never before joined with such plenitude of spirit."

Coleridge, Milton, these are wide spaces in which to wander; in the narrow limits of Pope's well-trimmed didacticism and neat satire Thompson's critical steps are equally sure. The opening paragraph of his essay on this little wasp of a man must delight the heart of

Chesterton with its demure satire on poets and glory; it is in the manner now known as Chestertonian but preceded that brave style by a decade. Passing this, however, passing also the clean-cut comparison with Dryden, one comes to this criticism of "The Rape of the Lock"; "It is Pope's masterpiece, a Watteau in verse, . . . this epic of the boudoir, . . . the fairyland of powder and patches, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' seen through chocolate fumes." Upon the threadbare question. Was Pope a poet? he is clear-headed and conclusive. "Call his verse poetry or what you will," he says, "it is work in verse which could not have been done in prose and, of its kind, never equaled." Throughout, Pope is interpreted in terms of Dryden, which doubles the work of criticism and includes eighteenth century satire as well. All of which Thompson packed into so single a sentence as this: "The gods are in pairs, male and female; and if Dryden was the Mars of English satire, Pope was the Venus—a very eighteenth century Venus,

quite as conspicuous for malice as for elegance."

One would like to stop at Spenser, "the poet's poet," at the prose of Shakespeare, of Ben Jonson, of Sidney, at Bacon, "an opportunist of the first water, a respectable British Machiavel," at Macaulay, "the *Sauric* deity of English letters, the artist of the obvious," were it not a species of indignity to those who want their Thompson first hand. One last example may be set down which, even in the mutilation of ruthless cutting, is beautiful with the terseness and great good sense of Thompson's prose. Here it is, an epitome of his own De Quincey:

"A little, wrinkly, high-foreheaded, dress-as-you-please man; a meandering, inhumanly intellectual man, shy as a hermit crab; . . . uncanny as a sprite begotten of libraries; something of a bore by reason of talking like a book in coat and breeches . . . master of a great, unequal, seductive, and irritating style; author

of sixteen delightful and intolerable volumes, part of which can never die, and much of which can never live: that is De Quincey."

These, in brief, are examples, not of the best nor the worst but of the very golden average of Francis Thompson's essays. Uncommonly good stuff for periodical copy, one thinks, and understands the patience with which editors waited for his articles, knowing what they would get at the end of unpredictable delays. One is inclined to agree, too, with Mr. Lewis Hind, at that time (1897) editing the *Academy,* who wrote:

"A Thompson article in the *Academy* gave distinction to the issue. What splendid prose it was! Reading the proofs, we would declaim passages aloud for the mere joy of giving utterance to his periods. He wrote a series of articles on 'Poets as Prose Writers' which must some day be recovered from the files; he wrote on anything. . . . Here was a man who ma-

nipulated words as they (generals) manipulated men." [3]

One might quote letters of compliment from Henley who did not know "which to admire more (in Thompson): His critical intelligence or his intellectual courage"; letters of praise from Browning (among the last he wrote) pronouncing "both poetry and prose indeed remarkable." [4] But since the content and style of Thompson's prose are the object of this particular quest, we had best sum up our findings thus far. They are:

Item 1. One volume of short essays, originally periodical articles on the stock figures in English literature.

Item 2. Uncommonly keen discrimination, nice distinctions, scholarly and intimate knowledge of subjects under discussion.

Item 3. To quote himself on Crashaw—"An extraordinary cunning of diction cleaving

[3] C. L. Hind, "Poet Journalist," *Harper's Weekly*, 52: 24, Jan. 18, 1908.

[4] E. Meynell, *Life of Francis Thompson*, 263: 120.

like a gold leaf to its object"; a style "without fear, without reproach."

III

The essay on Shelley has been consciously omitted from the foregoing group because it does not seem to belong to it. Critical prose it may be; elegiac, poetic prose it surely is, the singing prose in which one natural mystic greets another as he meets and recognizes him, in spite of anarchistic disguises, as a brother. It is like nothing else in English prose and so is not legitimate material for comparison. One would hardly call it the high-water mark of Thompson's prose; it is so much more one rushing highest wave, breaking into the brilliance of thought and expression, and drawing back to leave its burden of grave fact upon the washed shore of the reader's mind. Comment on its style is idle; for those who have read the essay, unwelcome; and for those who have not, useless. Since its publication in 1908 critical

and appreciative literature on Shelley is incomplete without it.

IV

Biography was the second class of prose to which Francis Thompson adapted himself, and biography of the least naturally attractive kind, the lives of the saints. Hagiography has been, until very recently, about as unpopular as a thing can be and get itself printed. And the fault is its own. Through some foolish fear of disedification, biographers fell into the habit of suppressing such facts in the lives of their subjects as might betray the fact that they were human and natural. A far cry from the story of Peter, of Thomas, of Magdalen. And not relevant here except in connection with the *Life of St. Ignatius,* which is an antidote for the fatty degeneration of pietism from which so many such biographies have happily expired. Requiescant! It was not published until 1910, three years after Thompson's death,

and represents the last of all his loving, careful work.

Out of all the high praise of reviews and reviewers these cut sentences of William Barry in the *Dublin Review,* July, 1908, indicate the attitude of the public toward the book: "The *Life of St. Ignatius* will stand alone as a biography of a Catholic hero written in choicest English by a master of prose, by a seer, and a son of the Renaissance, born out of due time. . . . If we term this volume a portrait of Ignatius of Loyola drawn by Francis Thompson, we shall have described it in a phrase. It is a portrait from life, not a copy." One might multiply quotations from Jesuit scholars in this country and abroad, J. H. Pollen and J. J. Daly for example, as to the precision and accuracy of the book as a biography; its grace, vigor, and simplicity as an addition to letters. Instances from the *Life* itself are more to the purpose. One is surprised to find the writer of "the multitudinous simple thing," of the "Orient Ode" or "A Corymbus for Autumn,"

a master of the monosyllabic sentence. Here are a half dozen such, ripped from their context, but aimed between the eyes, nevertheless. "Then things grew worse." "It was to be a change of flags." "He did it." "He was right." "Ignatius, like the small Teresa, had the Mediæval inspiration hot at heart." Less circumscribed examples of his directness are: "Such was the preliminary skirmishing; the battle was to come." No less than Carlyle, he upheld the holiness of worthy work. "Audacious, willful, gallant, turbulent, hot-tempered, quick alike to letters and all manly exercise or accomplishment, he was the stuff out of which greatness comes for good or ill, a Clive, a Byron, or a Saint. For [this is the style of Chesterton but the pen of Thompson] it is the crudest of fallacies to suppose that saints are fashioned customarily from tea and carpet slippers." [5] The point lies in the fact that it was written before Chesterton had published any but his earliest and least representative books.

[5] F. Thompson, *Life of St. Ignatius*, 142.

Everywhere in the book one meets with the careful, well-poised scholarship that can, in one brief paragraph, set the stage with the merging backgrounds of the Spanish court, the German empire, the kingdoms of France and England for the entrance of the hero. There is a constant pleasant meeting with all manner of friends; Don Quixote, Swift and Stella, Shakespeare's Viola, Crashaw, George Eliot, and Thomas à Kempis, "the pine wood of Ravenna, Dante's wood and Shelley's," Gil Blas, the Abyssinian maid and Mount Abora, Coleridge, and Lamb. There is also a bright audacity of spirit shining through the book, a happy freedom begotten of a congenial subject and abandonment to it. It is a whole-hearted but reverent unconventionality which one associates with Chesterton above all men of the present day and is significant because, again, it is before him.

To cast about a second time and take bearings from these observations of Thompson's biographical prose, one has:

Item 1. A certain directness of style, frequently monosyllabic in its brevity.

Item 2. Evidence of wide and scholarly reading already noted, a keenness in fitting facts and people together.

Item 3. A fearlessness of style and a lack of self-consciousness which, with Items 1 and 2, readers have grown accustomed to regard as Chestertonian accompaniments of the paradox, but which belonged to Thompson first.

A study of the prose of Francis Thompson would eagerly include his letters and possible findings from the dozens of notebooks which are probably in the hands of Wilfred Meynell, his by right of discovery, recovery, and preservation. On a day when they are published a fuller appreciation of their writer can be made; a consideration of such letters and notes as are included in *The Life of Francis Thompson* by Everard Meynell will be included in this study of the personal essays. But for that something of an introduction will be necessary.

V

Many spirits were abroad in letters during the nineteenth century; unmistakably among them the spirits of mysticism and symbolism, of epigrammatic style, and of an unbending ease and boldness in choice and treatment of subject. These three terms are, so to speak, the common denominator of a number of fractions whose sum is the Catholic Spirit in nineteenth century literature. (By Catholic is meant the traditionally Christian, mystical outlook upon life. By mysticism is meant an endeavor to find God at first hand and to understand and interpret all existence in the light of that discovery.) Alice Meynell, Hilaire Belloc, Theodore Maynard are terms in the numerator; Patmore, Thompson, and Chesterton are in some ways more dominating ones. With them at any rate our concern is.

Coventry Patmore wrote two books, *Religio Poetæ* in 1893 and *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower* in 1895 which became immediately

the dominating influence in Thompson's manner of thought and expression. They are the quintessence of this common denominator, mysticism and symbolism, epigrammatic style, boldness in choice and treatment of subject. But as they stand they are patently esoteric, arcane. Thompson has made them tangible; Chesterton has made them popular.

To prove this it will be best to consider the substance of Patmore's books, the reappearance of their themes in Thompson's personal essays, and their spirit ranging through Chesterton. The personal essays have been chosen because they are personal. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* will be used in the comparison for the same reason. It is no part of my purpose to contend that Chesterton in any conscious way imitated either Patmore or Thompson; only his own statement could prove that. But that the spirit of one, the style of one, the manner of one, embodied by the other, have passed on to him, conscious or unconscious, is the point.

Chesterton was quite aware of the spirit of both men. He says of Patmore: "He was bursting with ideas, like Browning—and truer ideas as a rule. No one will ever forget the first time he read Patmore's hint that the cosmos is a thing that God made huge only 'to make dirt cheap.' These things are not jokes, but discoveries." And of Thompson in the same passage he says:

"But none of these [the Victorians] were able even to understand Francis Thompson; his sky-scraping humility, his mountains of mystical detail, his occasional and unashamed weakness, his sudden and sacred blasphemies." From which one may infer that he, at least, claimed to understand him. That he also recognized the kinship of the two his own speech betrays. Speaking of Newman he says: "The suggestion of him lingers on in the exquisite Elizabethan perversity of Coventry Patmore; and has later flamed out from the shy volcano of Francis Thompson."

One must come to the *Religio Poetæ* with St. Augustine's key to all true mysticism, this statement regarding the Scripture: "The more interpretations the better." Patmore proceeds to interpret John the Baptist, the precursor of Christ, as natural love is the precursor of divine love. His food, honey and locusts, signifies natural good; his garment of camel's hair and leathern girdle denote also what is natural. Then the whole significance of natural love, its relation to the divine, its reflection in the love of man and woman, its fulfillment in the nuptial relation of Christ and the Church is worked out.

Similarly the language of Religion is interpreted, the meaning of the points of the compass explained. "The West in Scripture and all ancient mythologies symbolized the flesh, as the East the spirit." [6] In a letter to Francis Thompson, Patmore is more complete and explicit. He writes: "The North seems always to signify the original Godhead, the 'Father'

[6] C. Patmore, *Rod, Root, and Flower,* 136.

—or the Devil. . . . The North represents the simple Divine virility, the South the Divine womanhood, the East their synthesis in the Holy Spirit, and the West the pure *natural* womanhood 'ful of grace.' " [7] Mysticism he calls by Cardinal Wiseman's name, "the science of love." "God," he says, "is at once the mirror and the mirrored, the lover and the beloved. Every soul was created to be, if it chose, the participator of this felicity. . . . This is the sum total of 'mysticism' or true 'science.' " God is defined as "an Act" (St. Thomas) or as "the embrace of the First and Second Persons, and their unity is the thence proceeding Spirit of Life." [8] God's relation to the world is interpreted as a nuptial relation; all human loves in their relations, whether of marriage or consecrated virginity, are reflections of this. "God has declared to us His mystic rapture in His Marriage with Humanity in twice saying: '*Hic est Filius meus dilec-*

[7] E. Meynell, *op. cit.*, 194, 195.
[8] C. Patmore, *Rod, Root, and Flower*, 65, 108.

tus in quo bene complacui.' He expressly and repeatedly calls this marriage, and pronounces the marriage of man and woman to be its symbol. *This is the burning heart of the Universe"* (p. 216).

This most fragmentary of summaries will illustrate both the mysticism of Patmore and its extreme esotericism. That these are hard sayings he himself realized, and addressed them only to those who had ears to hear. Francis Thompson was one such listener, and through him more readily than through Patmore himself do we come to some of the easier meanings.

His biographer says, *"Rod, Root, and Flower* set him [Thompson] to work in the same nursery garden." [9] In his "Sanctity and Song" he echoes his teacher. "To most, even good people, God is a belief. To the saints He is an embrace." Again in the same essay, his statement, "Now grace does not supersede, but acts along the lines of Nature" is a simpler form of Patmore's "He conquers nature only

[9] E. Meynell, *op. cit.*, 227.

by reconciling it."[10] In "Paganism Old and New" he discusses the rite of pagan marriage as the goal and attainment of Love, and turns to the mystic's understanding of marriage as a foreshadowing of the spirit's ultimate union in God. The essay needs only to be read in connection with "Love and Poetry" in *Religio Poetæ* to make evident the kindred minds of the two men.

The doctrine of the Trinity, the espousals of Christ and the soul, the mystical union of Christ with the Church, which are the constant themes of *Rod, Root, and Flower,* are clarified and simplified in Thompson's "Form and Formalism." Consider these parallels from the two: "In His union and conjunction with Body, God finds His final perfection and felicity," and "In Christ, therefore, centers and is solved that sovereign problem of life—the marriage of the Unit with Sum." Turning to "The Bow Set in the Cloud" in *Religio Poetæ* we have:

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10 C. Patmore, *Rod, Root, and Flower,* 124.

"The mystery of triple Personality in one Being . . . may be best approached by the human mind under the analogue of difference of sex in one entity; Nature herself adding her crowning witness, without which men are incapable of effectually grasping any spiritual truths." In "Nature's Immortality" Thompson says, "If the Trinity were not revealed, I would nevertheless be induced to suspect the existence of such a master key by the trinities through which expounds itself the spirit of man." Again, in the same essay, "Within the Spirit Who is Heaven lies Earth; for within Him rests the great conception of Creation" is an explanation of Patmore's cryptic "Heaven is too much like Earth to be spoken of, as it really is, lest the generality should think it like their Earth, which is Hell."

"Health and Holiness" is a highly ascetic essay of Francis Thompson on the relation of soul and body. Here is mysticism indeed, but still of a sort more tangible than Patmore's. To take a single example, Patmore says in *Rod,*

Root, and Flower: " 'The human form divine.' It is actually divine; for the Body is the house of God, and an image of Him." Thompson expresses the same idea thus: "The whole scheme of history displays the body as 'Creation's and Creator's crowning good.' " The comparison of the Saint and the Poet as it occurs in *Religio Poetæ* and "Health and Holiness" are too long to be quoted but too significant to be ignored.

Of the common mysticism of these two nineteenth century writers, their works abundantly testify. If they did not, here is a letter from Francis Thompson in proof. It is addressed to Patmore:

Pantasaph, June 15, 1893.

Dear Sir—The esoteric essays—which I naturally turned to first—could only have come from the writer of *The Unknown Eros*. . . . Against one reprehensible habit of yours . . . I feel forced to protest. In a fragment of a projected article I had written of "poets born with an instinctive sense of veritable cor-

respondences hidden from the multitude." . . . Now if you will turn to your own *Religio Poetæ,* you will see of what I accuse you. Masters have privileges, I admit, but I draw the line at looking over their pupils' shoulders various odd leagues away.[11]

The sentence to which he refers is, "The poet, again, is not more singular for the delicacy of his spiritual insight which enables him to see celestial beauty and substantial reality where all is blank to most others." And Patmore writes back to Thompson: "I see, with joy, how nearly we are upon the same lines"; and again: "My heart goes out to you as to no other man; for are we not visited by a great common delight and a great common sorrow? Is not this to be one in Christ?" [12]

To sum up this much of the comparison, Patmore and Thompson met deliberately upon the same common ground of mysticism.

[11] E. Meynell, *op. cit.,* 192.
[12] *Ibid.,* 221.

But where Patmore is obscure and abstract, Thompson is clear and concrete. Patmore theorized on the mystical religion of the poet; Thompson concretizes it in the Canticles of St. Francis of Assisi; Patmore speaks of the relation of the First and Second Persons of God and the simultaneously resulting Third Person; Thompson finds footprints of the Trinity in the marriage of Soul and Body and the resulting Life.

To proceed methodically it will be necessary to prove next that Chesterton is also a mystic in his writings and that he has popularized the truths made tangible by Thompson. His spiritual autobiography, *Orthodoxy,* has already been agreed upon as the text. Of mysticism he says in it: "Mysticism keeps men sane. . . . The ordinary man has always been sane because the ordinary man has always been a mystic. . . . The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand. . . . The mystic allows one thing to be mys-

terious, and everything else becomes lucid. Like the sun at noonday, mysticism explains everything else by the blaze of its own victorious invisibility" (pp. 48-50). Because Chesterton is so much a man of the world, his interest in the mystical is of a more popular nature and deals with subjects of more general speculation; original sin, the freedom of the will, redemption, optimism, and pessimism. But even upon these he speaks in Assisian transports, as: "The Christian optimism is based on the fact that we do not fit into the world. . . . The optimist's pleasure was prosaic, for it dwelt on the naturalness of everything; the Christian pleasure was poetic, for it dwelt on the unnaturalness of everything in the light of the supernatural. The modern philosopher had told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the *wrong* place, and my soul sang for joy. . . . I knew now why I could feel homesick at home" (p. 147). Francis

Thompson in his most transcendent poetic yearnings, or indeed that other Francis, of Assisi, never expressed more directly St. Augustine's "Our hearts were made for Thee, O Lord, and they cannot rest until they rest in Thee." Thompson has the longing embodied in most of his personal writing, as: "In proportion as each of us by virtue has become kin to God, will he penetrate the Supreme Spirit, and identify himself with the Divine Ideals. There . . . are all visions, all fairness engirdled with the eternal Fair. This, my hope, is laid up in my bosom." [13] Again, this figure in *Orthodoxy*: "The root phrase for all Christian theism was this, that God was a Creator, as an artist is a creator," is a homely reflection of "The Supreme Spirit, creating, reveals His conceptions . . . in the material forms. . . . An ideal wakes in the Omnipotent Painter; and straightway over the eternal dikes rush forth the flooding tides of night, the blue of Heaven ripples into stars; Nature, from Alp

[13] *Works of Francis Thompson*, 3, 88.

to Alpine flower, rises lovely with the betrayal of the Divine thought." [14]

Mystic and journalist meet on the common subject of Nature, in its pagan and Christian relations to men. The mystic says: "What is this heart of Nature, if it exists at all? Is it, according to the conventional doctrine derived from Wordsworth and Shelley, a heart of love? . . . No; in this sense I repeat seriously what I said lightly: Nature has no heart. Absolute Nature lives not in our life, nor yet is lifeless, but lives in the life of God: and in so far, and so far merely, as man himself lives in that life, does he come into sympathy with Nature, and Nature with him. She is God's daughter, who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends. Not Shelley, not Wordsworth himself, ever drew so close to the heart of Nature as did the Seraph of Assisi, who was close to the Heart of God." [15] Chesterton follows Thompson like a shadow here. He says:

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[14] *Works of Francis Thompson*, 3, 86.
[15] *Ibid.*, 3, 81, 82.

"Unfortunately, if you regard Nature as a mother, you discover that she is a stepmother. The main point of Christianity was this: that Nature is not our mother: Nature is our sister. . . . Nature was a solemn mother to Wordsworth or to Emerson. But Nature is not a solemn mother to Francis of Assisi or to George Herbert. To Francis, Nature is a sister, and even a younger sister—a little dancing sister, to be laughed at as well as loved." [16]

Again Chesterton says: "Certainly the most sagacious creeds may suggest that we should pursue God into deeper and deeper rings of the labyrinth of our own ego. But only we of Christendom have said that we should hunt God like an eagle upon the mountains: and we have killed all monsters in the chase," which is a reversed aspect of "The Hound of Heaven" or a postscript to "the mysterious strife," "the heavenly contest" of the soul in its pursuit of God, described in "Sanctity and Song." The cross and its myriad meaning is everywhere in

[16] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 207.

the writing of both men. Chesterton's interpretation is near to classic. "The cross, though it has at its heart a collision and a contradiction, can extend its four arms forever without altering its shape. . . . The cross opens its arms to the four winds. It is a signpost for free travelers." [17] Thompson raises "the banner of the Stigmata" in the name of the Salvation Army in his "In Darkest England"; the folly of the cross shines through "Health and Holiness." Or, with loving glance across the centuries, he sees the "Creator, Who, not content with giving us salvation on the cross, gave us also at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, love. For there love was consecrated, and declared a child of Jehovah, not of Jove." The mirror of Chesterton catches the picture and gives back this reflection: "It is just here that Christianity is on the side of humanity and liberty and love. Love desires personality; therefore, love desires division. It is the instinct of Chris-

[17] *Ibid.*, 50.

tianity . . . to say, " 'Little Children, love one another.' " [18]

Further examples will only multiply evidence already sufficient to prove not only the mysticism of Chesterton, but its similarity, even in expression, to that of Thompson. This final instance is unmistakable. Chesterton concludes *Orthodoxy* with a panegyric on joy; which changes before one's eyes into this exquisite, mystical picture of Christ. "The tremendous figure which fills the Gospels towers in this respect, as in every other, above all the thinkers who ever thought themselves tall. His pathos was natural, almost casual. . . . He never concealed His tears . . . He never restrained His anger. . . . Yet He restrained something. I say it with reverence; there was in that shattering personality a thread that must be called shyness. . . . There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth." A

[18] G. K. Chesterton, *op. cit.*, 245.

decade before Thompson had written in "Mœstitæ Encomium," "Sorrow is fair with an immortal fairness, which we see not till it is humanized in the sorrowful. . . . Of the most beautiful among the sons of men it is recorded that, though many had seen Him weep, no man had seen Him smile."

A brief statement of dates is pertinent here before making a conclusive summary. Patmore's last prose was written in 1895; Thompson began writing prose in 1887 and continued until his death in 1907; the greater part of it was done, however, during the last ten years of his life. Chesterton published *Orthodoxy* in 1904 and his other most significant books have been written since that time.

The steps now seem pretty clear; first, that Patmore, Thompson, and Chesterton are all mystics in spirit and in their most personal prose; second, that as Thompson is less esoteric than Patmore and less clamorous than Chesterton, but stands between them in the order of time, he may be regarded as transi-

tional between them. An incidental corroboration of this theory comes in this statement from *The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature* by George Shuster. Mr. Shuster says: "Another sort of relationship [mystical] is discernible between Coventry Patmore and the author of *Manalive* and *The Man Who Was Thursday*. . . . Neither would it be extremely difficult to trace a parallel between *What's Wrong With the World* and *Religio Poetæ*." Remembering Chesterton's own statement of the relation between Patmore and Thompson, one comes rather close to a set of equations in which things equal to the same thing are equal to each other.

VI

Now for the quest of the epigrammatic style. The way lies straight ahead. *Rod, Root, and Flower* is a book of epigrams. So, one may say, are Bacon's *Essays;* so, indeed, are the *Books of Wisdom* and *Proverbs.* But

that it was Patmore's epigrams rather than Bacon's or Solomon's that influenced Thompson's style immediately, we have from his biographer. He says: "His notebooks reflect Patmore's aphoristic habit. He himself defended or denied the 'fragmentary' nature of Patmore's book. 'It might as well be said that the heavens are fragmentary because the stars are not linked by golden chains.' " [19] To prove that the tendency to a direct and compact style grew with his growth, one needs only to compare the impassioned prose of his Shelley of 1887 with the vigorous economy of his prose in the *Life of St. Ignatius,* written perhaps fifteen years later. But that his epigrams ever took on themselves the impertinence of the paradox sounds rather far fetched, until one diverts himself from the fascination of Thompson's substance to regard the manner of his style. Then one is reminded of no person so much as of Chesterton. His very definition of mysticism sounds the note. "Mysti-

[19] E. Meynell, *op. cit.,* 227.

cism," he says, "is morality carried to the *n*th power." Again, "Ritual is poetry addressed to the eye," or "The perfectest human sympathy is only the least imperfect," [20] which is half Patmore, half Chesterton. This is of a piece with most of Chesterton's comments on his countrymen. "As a writer De Quincey has been viewed with the complete partiality dear to the English mind and hateful to his own. He loved

to divide
A hair twixt south and southwest side;

the Englishman yearns for his hair one and indivisible." His essay on Macaulay is more Chestertonian than Chesterton. He says, "The good old times were the bad old times; the very kitchens of Olympus bear witness that there has been such a thing as progress," and he continues with a pseudo-proclamation of Macaulay from the Olympus of middle-class majesties which is a trumpet call to Ches-

[20] *Ibid.*, 199, 201.

terton. His essay on Milton begins, "The most apocalyptic of English poets was appropriately a John; more inappropriately, one of the richest of all poets was a Puritan." Of Emerson he speaks as "a man who united with the profound common sense of eminent genius the profound uncommon sense of eminent genius." His summary of the "Divine Comedy" might have been written by Chesterton: "It is the most narrow, most universal; it is the Middle Ages, it is Dante; it is Florence, it is the world." His very adjectives are of the paradoxical type—"the heavenly Quixote," "the band of celestial adventurers," "divinely unprincipled sleights . . . heavenly cunning."

His parallels are as startling and as bold as any that Chesterton has dared. Who else but he would dream of comparing Ignatius of Loyola with John Wesley, or parallel Rodriguez' methods of evangelization with those of the Salvation Army? Thompson does both these things.[21] Nor would any one but the ir-

[21] F. Thompson, *Life of St. Ignatius*, 151, 157.

repressible G. K. C. have retorted thus to an attack upon the usefulness of poetry. "Nay, if necessity be any criterion of usefulness, the universal practice of mankind will prove poetry to be more useful than soap; since there is no recorded age in which men did not use poetry, but for some odd thousand years the world got on very tolerably well without soap." [22]

This handful of examples should be enough to point Thompson's right to the paradox, prior even to him to whom it now belongs by right of eminent domain. But for whole pages of evidence one need only go to the essays on Pope or De Quincey and discover Chesterton outparadoxed with simplicity and ease.

VII

The certain bright bravery and boldness in choice and treatment of subject that was designated as the third term in the common denominator of these three writers ought to be plain from the numerous quotations or from

[22] *Works of Francis Thompson*, 3, 107.

the very titles of their essays: "Limericks and Counsels of Perfection," "The Precursor," "In Darkest England," "Possibilities and Performances," "What I Found in My Pocket," "Paganism Old and New," "The Limitations of Genius," "On Running After One's Hat," "The Prehistoric Railway Station," and "The Fourth Order of Humanity" are varied and suggestive enough. That "The Precursor" is an essay on the relation of human to Divine love, that "In Darkest England" is chiefly an essay in high praise of the Salvation Army, that "The Fourth Order of Humanity" is dolls, and that these are essays of Patmore, Thompson, and Chesterton chosen at random are suggestive evidence for a case which the actual reading of a number of these essays would prove.

VIII

Here ends the explorations; now for the final report of findings. They stand as follows:

PROSE OF FRANCIS THOMPSON

1. The Prose of Francis Thompson consists of one volume of essays and two of biography, which, as far as examined by themselves, exhibit keen discernment, careful scholarship, and a style rare even among masters of style.

2. The Prose of Francis Thompson is essentially mystical, a spirit which he shared consciously with Patmore as pupil with teacher, unconsciously with Chesterton.

3. The Prose of Francis Thompson is epigrammatic to the point of paradox, a style which he practiced from Patmore and in which he foreshadowed Chesterton.

4. The Prose of Francis Thompson has the jaunty boldness of style and subject matter in which Chesterton leads the world.

This paper proves nothing. It indicates these facts and furnishes specific instances to substantiate them. Likeness with a difference is the great pattern of all existence. Francis Thompson was like some one, quite as truly as he was unlike almost every one. That his prose was like Patmore's he himself recognized.

That the mysticism, the paradoxes, the parallels so unquestioningly attributed to Chesterton were used earlier by Thompson has also been shown. Whether these things were accidental or coincidental or deliberate is of no matter. That Patmore was the esoteric and epigrammatic mystic his own words to Thompson prove. That Chesterton is the popular and paradoxical mystic all present-day critics will agree. In that Francis Thompson partakes of the spirit of both, the content and style of both, and stands in point of time between them, he seems, in his prose, to be a transition from Patmore to Chesterton.

THE RELIGIOUS POETRY OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

THE RELIGIOUS POETRY OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

I

ANY criticism of religious poetry must be double barreled in character to strike a double mark, spiritual and literary. It must also reach, with scattered shot, at least, that diffuse and often difficult thing, the spirit of the age. Religion, literally, means a gathering, a collecting, a binding back to God. There is no reference to the particular creed or dogma which forms the bond. Such a return, such a binding back was one of the most definite, far-reaching, and significant characteristics of the nineteenth century. Scientific research was in the air, and materialism and rationalism, but with neither the strength nor the force with which religion was in the air. The intellectual strength of England was nowhere so concen-

trated and organized as in the Oxford Movement. It resulted in a "Catholic reaction, admittedly one of the great phenomena of nineteenth century thought." [1] In itself it bound back to God, by definite and dogmatic bonds, many of the most acute thinkers of the age; in its effects it shook Anglican England as even atheistic evolution could not shake Christian England. Religion was, then, a prime preoccupation of the century. Its reflection in literature was inevitable, and while employing the tract as its official vehicle, it found its best literary expression in the poetry of the period.

All singers of the nineteenth century may be roughly classified as *poets* and *religious poets*—which puts the emphasis about where it belongs. In other words, there were the poets whose inspiration was poetry, and the poets whose inspiration was religion—the binding back of man to God. This latter group is again divided into two quite distinct classes; the poets of doctrine and the poets of personal

[1] K. Bregy, *The Poets' Chantry*, 124.

experience. The first wrote devotional hymns and poems celebrating the teachings, feasts, and saints of the Church. Keble, Newman, Faber, and Aubrey De Vere are its best exponents. The second sang of intimate union with and experimental knowledge of God; it includes Patmore, the Rossettis, Gerard Hopkins, Lionel Johnson, Francis Thompson, and Alice Meynell, mystics all in varying degrees according to their capacities. These dozen names include the major writers of religious poetry of the nineteenth century and it is with their work that this essay is concerned.

II

Two questions may be anticipated and answered in the very beginning: first, were there not more non-Catholic poets of distinction in this group; and second, should not the Brownings, Tennyson, and possibly Jean Ingelow be included in it?

The answer to the first question is: No; the

great non-Catholic singers not included here were *poets* rather than *religious* poets; their achievement is to be appraised by artistic rather than spiritual tests. The question of creed does not greatly affect the discussion, however, as religion is understood in its literal sense and not identified with any particular faith. As a matter of fact, all of the poets here named were Protestants at one time, except Thompson; Keble and the Rossettis remained so. But in every case, all of the writer's work is considered, not merely that which was done after conversion.[2]

The Brownings and Tennyson are among the poets with whom art was the first consideration; religion was subordinated to it. They

[2] The fact that most of the religious poets of the century are Catholic by profession and all of them are so in spirit is an interesting corollary to Arthur Machen's proposition, quoted from his "Hieroglyphics" in the *Literary Review* for November 17, 1923, 274. "Think of it and you will see that from the literary standpoint, Catholic dogma is merely the witness, under a special symbolism, of the enduring facts of human nature and the universe; it is merely the voice which tells us that man is not a creature of the drawing room and the stock exchange, but a lonely awful soul confronted by the Source of all Souls, and you will realize that to make literature it is necessary to be, at all events, subconsciously Catholic."

sang for themselves rather than for Divinity. So they can hardly be considered as essentially poets of the binding back of man to God.

Religious poetry was for Elizabeth Browning chiefly a rest room, in which she waited until such time as love should come. It was not the devotion of her life; it fell off with the coming of Browning, and after "the first time he kissed" her, failed almost entirely. That she was naturally religious does not strengthen the case; it only emphasizes the fact that even her spiritual nature found more completeness in human than divine love.

Robert Browning was a philosopher, an ethical teacher rather than a lover of God by profession. It is not a soul satisfied by union but a mind convinced by reason that he sings. His poetry upon religious subjects is a study in itself and would demand the space of an entire book for complete treatment.[3]

[3] Such treatment may be found in H. Jones' *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher,* G. W. Cooke's *Poets and Problems,* A. D. Martin's "Robert Browning, Artist and Prophet," in *The Poetry Review* for September and October, 1923.

Though Tennyson glories in religious sentiment, one would hardly call anything that he has written religious poetry. "The Holy Grail" comes nearest to it, in subject at least. But even here the theme is sentimentalized. Anyone who has girt on the sword of the spirit knows that the girdle is made of something more galling than the silken braids of a visionary maiden's hair. So, elsewhere there is a subordination of religious reality to poetry; God made excellent stage property; Arthur shone more heroically in the light of Christ's personality than in anything that even Tennyson could invent. "In Memoriam" speaks the language of platitudinous rather than thorn-crowned sorrow. So, throughout, Tennyson's is the lovely poetry of pious sentiment.

The difference between it and the poetry of religious consecration is illustrated by contrasting the following passage from "The Passing of Arthur" with "Heaven Haven" by Gerard Hopkins.

"I am going a long way
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls no hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

Gerard Hopkins almost paraphrased these lines, but chastened and lashed them into austerity by the whip of a discipline that made a grand refusal of the slow motion and dreamy music of Tennyson. Here is the result, stripped utterly of self:

"I have desired to go
Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be
Where no storms come,

Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea."

It was Tennyson's preoccupation with the healing of his own "grievous wound" that kept his poetry about religion out of the class of religious poetry.

One feels that Jean Ingelow would have devoted herself as wholeheartedly to religious poetry as Adelaide Procter or Christina Rossetti did, had not her own facility got in her way. She wrote pretty narrative verse with such ease that her religious intensities gradually became absorbed and dissolved in this, losing in the process both their identity and their strength. Such poems as "Honors I and II" show what kind of religious poetry she might have written, had she foregone the easier way. As it is, her place among the singers of things spiritual is only potential.

Preliminary difficulties having been cleared away, the discussion proper can begin.

III

When, in 1827, John Keble published *The Christian Year* he aimed not at all at "classic form or romantic passion"; the simplicity of humble religious zeal was his impelling force. "Next to a sound rule of faith," he says himself in the preface to the edition of 1851, "there is nothing of so much consequence as a sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion, and it is the peculiar happiness of the Church of England to possess . . . an ample . . . provision for both. But in times of much leisure and unbounded curiosity, when excitement of every kind is sought after with a morbid eagerness, this part of the merit of our Liturgy is likely . . . to be lost. . . . The object of the present publication will be attained, if any person find assistance from it in bringing his own thoughts and feelings into more entire unison with those recommended and exemplified in the Prayer Book." Here is a declaration of religious purpose, to be ac-

complished by doctrinal and liturgical means. Poetry was the medium. Keble is the first of the group of writers who employed the religious hymn to teach dogma and stimulate devotion, and whose work constitutes the first type of religious poetry of their century.

While following the Church calendar of seasons and feasts, Keble made no point of doctrine as such in his *Christian Year;* frequently the vital truth which the day commemorates is subordinated or entirely eclipsed by some general expression of pious emotion, as in the hymn for Easter Sunday:

So is it still; to holy tears,
In lonely hours, Christ risen appears;
In social hours, who Christ would see,
Must turn all tasks to Charity.

He aimed rather at general religious feeling than at particular dogma; he desired to emphasize the "soothing tendency in the Prayer Book." Not infrequently also he surprised himself into beautiful lines, as:

The pale moon hurrying to the west.

. . . vows too pure to be performed,
And prayers blown wide by gales of care,

following them with such obtuse and jarring conclusions as:

These, and such faint half waking dreams,
Like stormy lights on mountain streams,
Wavering and broken all, athwart the conscience glare.

It is significant that in an age that bristled at the name of Mary, this devout Anglican should write with beautiful sincerity for the Feast of the Purification:

His throne, thy bosom blest,
O Mother undefiled—
That throne, if aught beneath the skies,
Beseems the sinless child.

The *Christian Year* is a moderate, not to say mild, book, whether of religion or poetry. Be-

yond it Keble did not venture in verse. It sounds hardly like the voice of a militant church or an ecstatic singer. It speaks of faith as a comforting truth, hardly as a passionate one; it hints at the symbolism in nature of things divine; it is never struck dumb by a vision of the Reality. Professor Shuster says: "Though religion meant everything to him [Keble], he was quite content with the sentiment and could never grasp the vital significance of dogma." [4] In which statement lies a summary appreciation of his poetry, its virtues and its limitations.

Chronologically, Newman follows Keble, though only on the calendar is he second, who was so eminently a leader of men. His poetry is an outcome of artistic versatility rather than any distinct gift of song. It is a creation of his mind rather than his heart. "Poetical compositions" [5] he calls his verses, and that is precisely what they are, correct always and glow-

[4] G. Shuster, *op. cit.*, 90, 91.
[5] J. H. Newman, *Verses for Various Occasions*, 5.

ing almost never. They had neither the conscious method nor purpose of Keble, but grew, as he says in his dedication of them to Edward Badely, "out of that Religious Movement which you yourself, as well as I, so faithfully followed from first to last." They are personal, introspective, self-revealing, yet they walk wide of lyric steeps and keep a decorous *via media* along paths of the Roman Breviary, the Greek Fathers, and St. Philip Neri. Dogmatic they are not in manner, but doctrinal always and essentially. Occasionally one finds such a spontaneous outburst as

I dreamed that, with a passionate complaint,
I wish'd me born amid God's deeds of might;

but almost immediately the lines become staid and the emotion reserved. They speak of God, heaven, our guardian angels, judgment, temptations, humiliations, doubts, and desires in the least imaginative English that rimes. They addressed practically the same audience that Keble spoke to, and aimed, with a difference

of creed, at much the same end. Less imaginative but more personal, they struck nearer home.

Newman wrote only one book of verses altogether, about half of which are on religious themes. The others are personal, most of them addressed to particular friends, simple and correct but hardly lyric. One subject wraps him beyond his scholar's attitude, the souls in purgatory. Here he is musical, dramatic. From the opening lines of "The Dream of Gerontius,"

Jesu, Maria—I am near to death,
And Thou art calling me; I know it now,
Not by the token of this faltering breath,
This chill at heart, this dampness on my brow

to its last stanza:

Farewell, but not forever! brother dear,
Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow;
Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,
And I will come and wake thee on the morrow,

one is conscious of a dramatic conception, a sustained and profound strength, and a musical sweetness unusual in his poetry. It is the dramatization of the Catholic doctrines of the particular judgment, purgatory, and the efficacy of prayers for the dead, a nineteenth century sequel to *Everyman.*

Here, then, from the man who stirred Oxford so profoundly is a contribution of unassuming verse and one great poem to the body of religious poetry of his century.

Father Faber could well have spared to his great contemporary some of his own exuberant imagination, to the advantage of both. It ran sweet and happy riot in the fields of Catholic symbolism, liturgy, doctrine, and tradition. It never either found or lost its way into mysticism. But it achieved the most popular expression of Catholic doctrine in verse form. Probably half of the English hymns commonly sung in Catholic churches to-day were written by Father Faber. Brother Azarias says of them: "These Hymns have a place in the

study of our spiritual progress. They give shape to our religious sentiments and make palpable the vague yearnings of our soul." [6]

A concretizing of religious feeling was precisely what he sought. "Hymns are purely practical things," he says in his preface, and his purpose in writing them was apostolic. "It is an immense mercy of God to allow anyone to do the least thing which brings souls nearer to Him." Here is the expressed object, the binding back of man to God. In how far he was successful one may judge from Professor Shuster's comment that for half a century Father Faber and Adelaide Procter held England in the palms of their hands. He employed an arrangement as methodical as Keble's, grouping his songs to follow the order of Catholic dogmatic theology. The first division contains hymns on God, His attributes, and the Trinity; the second treats of the sacred Humanity of Christ; the third furnishes devotional songs for the festivals of our Blessed

[6] F. Faber, *Hymns*, 15.

Lady and St. Joseph; and the fourth is devoted to the angels and the saints. Hymns for various occasions are added to these, making up a large collection of poems to be sung or used for "spiritual reading." [7]

Father Faber wrote poetry, not as an outlet for his own devotion; his secret, like that of all masters of the spiritual life, was his own; he knew it to be an "open sesame" to that shy, secluded place, the soul of the average man. He made no mistakes; his key unlocked more doors than he ever guessed. It is so simple, one wonders at its power. Where Keble is didactic, and Newman humble, Faber is child-like. To the Infant Christ he says:

Dear Little One! how sweet Thou art,
Thine eyes how bright they shine,
So bright they almost seem to speak
When Mary's look meets Thine!

This expresses his constant attitude to God:

[7] *Ibid.*, 27. Besides this volume of *Hymns*, which is exclusively religious, Father Faber has a volume of *Poems* which justify Wordsworth's high praise of them. They deal largely with nature and travel.

I could not sleep unless Thy Hand
Were underneath my head,
That I might kiss it, if I lay
Wakeful upon my bed.

Nowhere does Faber rise to exalted planes of inspired utterance but never does he fall below a high level of sincere and earnest spirituality. He displays a talent for anticlimaxes, threadbare approximations such as "transports" and "earthly bliss" and figures which have only the excuse of rime and rhythm, as:

I long to burrow out of sight.

He suffers from his own facility; in striving to supply a great need he wrote a great quantity. Very little of this abundance does not suffer from lack of concreteness, intensity, and strength. But all of it was loaves and fishes to the multitude, the Lay Folks' Prayer Book of the nineteenth century, and is exactly the same kind of an index to modern religious devotion as are, for their day, the rimed prayer books of the Middle Ages.

One wonders whether to put Aubrey De Vere among the writers of sacred verse or the singers of a more mystical message. Friend and contemporary of these three writers, he was the poet of the group. With an astounding aptitude for impossible titles, as "Religious Hypochondria" or "Evanescence of the Patriarchal Religion," he has an equally surprising power for poetic conception and beautiful expression. His sonnets supply such lines as:

Sorrows which God hath willed and Christ hath worn!

A wilderness of worlds by Thought untrod.[8]

One stands before such lines silent and satisfied. Metaphysical in his habits of mind, De Vere was so exquisitely domestic as to write for the consecration of a new house:

I bless thy House. I consecrate the whole
To God. It is His Temple. Let it be

[8] A. De Vere, *Poems*, pp. 261, 263.

Worthy of Him, confided thus to thee.
It hath great destinies, wherein do lie
Self-sown, the seeds of Immortality.

The calendar of the Catholic Church has a richness of spiritual and poetic beauty that few who know it can resist. Aubrey De Vere, receiving this as a gift rather than an inheritance, celebrated it in a group of religious poems, *inspired* rather than *dictated* by liturgy and dogma. His *May Carols* contain the best of these and make a calendar in which saint and feast day find themselves written in lines of tranquil loveliness. A choice is hard where all is beautiful. Here are a handful of lines to think on:

If I but touch His vesture's hem
I shall be healed, and strong and free—
Thou wert His vesture, Mary!—them
His virtues heal that reach to thee.

Nevertheless, doctrine and dogma possess his soul even more than poetry. In his preface, the author explains that the *Carols* are not

merely a collection of verses in honor of our Lady, but were composed mainly with the intention of illustrating the central doctrine of Christianity—the Incarnation—from a special point of view, which may be described as the "Theology of Mary."

So he stands the fourth among this group of sacred song writers, and in imagination, concreteness, and sustained vision, is the captain of them all.[9]

Because Keble, Newman, Faber, and De Vere chose the harbor of religious poetry, it must not be imagined that they were marooned in a little pool of piety and knew not at all the wild winds of thought that lashed less sheltered depths to storm. Keble says:

There are, who darkling and alone;
Would wish the weary night were gone,
Though dawning morn should only show
The secret of their unknown woe.[10]

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[9] Religious poetry constitutes not the most, but the best of De Vere's work. Ireland, its history and legends, is a favorite subject with him, as is also the poetic drama.

[10] J. Keble, *op. cit.*, 63.

And Newman:

Each stands alone, Christ's bonds asunder torn;
Each has his private thought, selects his school,
Conceals his creed . . . .
Brothers! spare reasoning; men have settled long
That ye are out of date and they are wise.[11]

Faber has an entire poem on "The Signs of the Times." De Vere epitomizes them as

The feasts of blank intelligence,[12]

and has this to say in straightforward condemnation on his "Hymn to the Meek":

Empiric laws, that hide the grace
Of human life, as hard
As iron masks upon a face
From answering eyes debarred,
Form but a lucid veil to you
With all the Godhead shining through.

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[11] J. H. Newman, *op. cit.*, 120.
[12] A. De Vere, *op. cit.*, 230.

Not ignorance, but rather fullness of knowledge kept these men unperturbed and confident in the midst of the particular chaos of thought that prevailed; they were content to rest this life and the next on the doctrines that the spirit of the age found unnecessary, unscientific, unpsychological. They were happy to sing the simplicity of their faith in a God whom their day had somehow proved obsolete. And if their songs lacked some of the subtle excellences of more intricate poetry, it was that they might the more easily find their way to the hearts of the people. These are the religious poets of the nineteenth century who, by their singing lines of doctrine and dogma and beautiful belief, strove to bind men back to God.

One other name should be added to this group of religious verse writers of distinction, Adelaide Procter, of whom De Vere so charmingly wrote,

She stooped o'er earth's poor brink, light as a breeze

And round her, like that wandering minstrel sent
Twofold delight—music with freshness blent.

That Dickens should have been the first editor of her poems may be somewhat of an anomaly, but that her contributions to *Household Words* were welcomed by a host of readers indicated the temper of the public of the early fifties. For the next half century her "Lost Word" and "Legend of Provence" were included in all pink and white editions of selected poetry; she was read and sung from platform and choir, and only when *elocution* subsided into *expression* did her popularity decline. Now, as one re-reads her collected poems, he is impressed with the incurious acquiescence with which she played the Pollyanna game, the facility with which she diagnosed and prescribed for all cases, acute or chronic, of suffering, sorrow, duty, or bereavement. The heaven of harps and wings, the silver lining are favorite remedies. Her treatment is soothing and platitudinous:

Wisdom and sight are well, but Trust is best.

Her work is to its poetry what the cross-stitch motto, "God Bless Our Home" was to the interior decorating of the nineteenth century. She is eminently the poet of the obvious, a master of devotional mediocrity, possessed of sight but not insight, and in place of vision and inspiration, sentimentality in all its sweet, romantic, and familiar varieties. No wonder she had her generation at her feet. One should not criticize with flippancy, however. "It is like telling one's beads or reading a prayer book, to turn over her pages—so beautiful, so pure and unselfish a spirit of faith, hope, and charity pervades and hallows them," says Stedman,[13] and in that appreciation her place among religious poets is defined at its best.

The history of hymnology of the century would supply a multitude of other names,[14] the Reverend J. S. Blackie, that indefatigable hymn writer and Greek scholar; Montgomery,

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[13] E. C. Stedman, *Victorian Poets*, 280.

[14] Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology*, 333, 343, 974-976.

and Milman perhaps surviving longer than the rest. The general tone of their devotional verse was "a sweetness, refinement, and emotional repose," [15] all illustrated admirably in the five most representative poets discussed.

Here, then, for the lovers of the category, is the first group of nineteenth century religious poets and poetry, singing with sweetness and sincerity songs of the Church's seasons, dogmas, and devotions in language that the average man knew and understood.

IV

The public to whom Adelaide Procter taught devotion in the nineteenth century is getting its religion to-day from the radio and the funny papers. Which is certainly an indication of advancement in one direction. On the other hand, the disciples of Patmore and the Rossettis are probably more numerous now than when the ink was drying on their manuscripts;

[15] E. C. Stedman, *op. cit.*, 277.

the complete poems of Lionel Johnson were edited by Ezra Pound in 1915; Robert Bridges published the poems of Gerard Hopkins in 1918. Francis Thompson has become a school and Alice Meynell a Carrara saint of song. The mystics are with us yet; their light has been shining for half a century and more, and at last we are trying to comprehend it. A beginning of such understanding is made when we consider them as the second group of significant religious poets of the nineteenth century. Their precursor might have been Aubrey De Vere; it probably was the accumulated intensities of the time. Their captain was Patmore.

Intellectuality has surrounded mysticism with a host of abstruse difficulties which only simplicity and childhood can penetrate. A group of children, not any of them over five years old, were playing in an old piano box on a sunny Saturday morning. This was their game; they were all looking up at the sky and calling out, "Hello, God; hello, God." It is

an excellent example of mysticism. The mystic is playing the same game, but according to his age, experience, condition of life, and intensity of soul, is calling out a different greeting. God is the one supreme reality in his life and he can understand nothing except in its relation to Him. His knowledge of Him is an experience rather than a belief; his devotion is passionate love rather than comfortable sentiment. He can enter into every relation with Him which is humanly possible and not sinful, and he does.

Coventry Patmore was a much-married man; he regarded marriage, quite correctly, as the reflection in human relations, of the perfect union of God, the Lover, with the human soul, His beloved. It is this wooing and wedding that he sings in *The Unknown Eros,* his most typical poetic expression. Of the consummated union he says:

The bashful meeting of strange Depth and Height
Breeds the forever new-born babe, Delight.

Of the whole subtle relation of God to the soul, of the soul to the body, and of man to woman, he sings almost ineffably in "Eros and Psyche." The soul speaks:

O Love, that like a rose,
Deckest my breast with beautiful repose.

Again she says:

What thing is this?
A God to make me, nothing, needful of His bliss,
And humbly wait my favor for a kiss.

And then, in utter abandonment beyond human imitation:

Thy love has conquered me; do with me as Thou wilt,
Sheathe in my heart sharp pain up to the hilt.

What could make naught the touch that made thee mine!
. . . Lover divine,
Thou still art jealously and wholly mine.

And, if you choose to come this eventide,
A touch, my Love, will set my casement wide.

This is neither the ordinary poetry of sentiment, nor piety sweetened to taste and served in rime. It is the intensest of apocalyptic speech about a relation, soul-shaking, personal, and irrevocably binding. If ever the nuptial relation of the soul and God had a biographer, it was Patmore. Esoteric his word must be by its very nature "and veiled," as he says, "that, seeing, none may see."

This seer in his English Patmos was also a frequenter of the market place, where, watching the wild progress of things, he observes dryly:

Not greatly moved with awe am I
To learn that we may spy
Five thousand firmaments beyond our own.
The best that's known
Of the heavenly bodies does them credit small.

Or again in fine scorn:

Ah! well does he who does but stand aside,
And prophecies 'gainst trust in such a tide;
For he sometimes is prophet, heavenly taught,
Whose message is that he sees only naught.

This was no pious dreamer nor ineffective singer of unintelligible things, but a man of his times, who, scrutinizing all its signs, saw transcending them, these two realities, God and the soul, and of these he sang. *The Angel of the House* is, beside *The Unknown Eros* his chief and most characteristic expression in poetry, and is in human love, the sequel to it.

Distracting his attention among many arts, Dante Gabriel Rossetti cheated himself out of his possible best achievement in any of them. His allegiance was, however, undivided; it was vowed to things of the spirit. But here again, indecision was his enemy. He was a potential mystic but an actual trimmer. He must not offend the gods of sentimentality. By some miracle of good taste he barely escaped the sticky and the sensual. But when his vision was clear and his heart high, he wrote beautiful things. Patmore might have wished to own his "Ave," addressed to the Blessed Virgin:

What human thought can apprehend
That mystery of motherhood

When thy Beloved at length renew'd
The sweet communion severéd—
His left hand underneath thine head
And His right hand embracing thee?
Lo! He is thine and this is He!

His sonnet sequence, "The House of Life," is a compromise between *The Unknown Eros* and "Sonnets from the Portuguese." The dangers and indecisions which beset his choice and treatment of subject, as well as his most terrible expressions of religious feeling are all here. "Lost Days," "Superscriptions," and "Retro Me, Sathana" are ominous, threatening, and fearful.

Get thee behind me, Satan. Oft unfurled
Thy perilous wings can beat and break like lath
Much mightiness of men to win thee praise,
Leave these weak feet to trend in narrow ways,

might have been written by Johnson or Hopkins, and cry the same terror of temptation as they knew. A keen consciousness of God he had, not actual vision. He wrote much that

was not religious poetry but almost nothing that did not betray a *hankering* for the spiritual. And he wrote best when he yielded to this frequently perverted craving. "What Dante Gabriel Rossetti lacked was intellectual conviction, the sense of the reality of spirit as spirit and body as body. . . . He tried to accomplish in philosophic twilight what must be done in believing day." [16] He was a negative mystic.

The spirit of his sister, Christina, may be judged by a single fact gathered from her life. It is said that she was scrupulously careful not to step on a scrap of paper in the street for fear it bore the Holy Name. This extreme reverence could scarcely forget itself in happiness or lift its grave, sad eyes to the hundredfold of joy on earth that God has prepared for those who love Him. Earth was to her a place of exile, and beside its rivers she could make no joyful songs, remembering Jerusalem. She was a poet of the Passion rather than of the

[16] G. Shuster, *op. cit.*, 182.

Resurrection. Perhaps this line, as much as any, is an index to her spiritual self:

If I might only love my God and die! [17]

One sees the habitual sadness of her songs in this, and her very quiet joy:

Dost Thou not love me, Lord, or care
For this mine ill?
I love thee here or there,
I will accept thy broken heart, lie still.

Only occasionally does she speak to God as to a lover and then with yearning more than importunity:

Draw Thou mine eyes, draw Thou mine heart above,
Brood over me with yearnings of a dove;
Be Husband, Brother, closest Friend to me.[18]

Her poetry, while not exclusively religious in theme, is always spiritual in character. Her

[17] C. Rossetti, "The Prince's Progress," 201.
[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 202, 211.

devotion to a single attitude becomes almost a disease; her homesickness for heaven is near to hypochondria, yet one cannot assail the patient sweetness of it. Hers is the most plaintive of all the music made by this group of spiritual singers.

Gerard Hopkins is a companion soul, dedicated to suffering and poetically "tongue-tied." By an anachronism of the Muses he stands ahead of the advance guards of *vers libre* writers, an adept exponent of the new poetry. His own preface to his collected poems is a most definite, concrete, and tangible apology for free verse. Yet he died in 1889, practically unheralded and even now almost undiscovered. Harriet Monroe says of him in her introduction to *The New Poetry:*

"Hopkins, in his Jesuit seclusion, worked out a deeply original metric pattern, capable of exquisitely rich, subtle, and flexible modulations, though always thoroughly controlled. In certain poems he presented an impressionistic rush of splendor, a veritable tumble

of gorgeous colors and sounds. . . . Almost any of his poems would carry conviction of the essential modernness of this priest who could ring adjectives like a chime of bells in such lines as:

'Tatter-tassel-tangled and dingle-a-dangled Dandy-hung dainty head.'"

One would like to stop at his theory of poetry, his talk of sprung and running rhythms, his own predilection for pattern, design, *inscape* as he calls it. But one is occupied with his talk of God, which was, after all, his prime obsession. "The Windhover—To Christ Our Lord" is the epitome of it. It would be hard to find a more difficult poem in the language. Hopkins considered this his best. It is, if a composite beyond the intricacies of Browning, the rhythms of Swinburne, the daring of Thompson could make it so. The wildest of heavenly thoughts are here caught and all but tangled in such an intricate net of words as to make it unquotable. Hop-

kins is so intoxicated with the excesses of his theme that he becomes almost incoherent in an effort to utter too much. He sings of a "Starlight Night" as only Blake before him has done; no poet, except possibly St. Francis of Assisi, has made such poetry as this out of the practices of perfection which constitute the discipline of the religious life:

Shape nothing, lips, be lovely-dumb
It is the shut, the curfew sent
From there where all surrenders come
Which only makes you eloquent.
O feel-of-primrose hands, O feet
That want the yield of plushy sward,
But you shall walk the golden street
And you unhouse and house the Lord.[19]

One would like to quote all of the sonnet, "God's Grandeur," to compare it with Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much With Us," and to comment on the flashing strength, the penetrating vision that saw beneath the dull spirit of that age and of every age

[19] G. Hopkins, *Poems*, 8.

. . . the dearest freshness
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent world
broods.

But enough has been said to prove abundantly Father Hopkins' right even to the Siege Perilous among this group of seekers after the awe-full vision of God. Only one small volume remains of all the poetry he wrote; this is almost exclusively religious; the rest he relentlessly destroyed. But this gives to his century a group of poems ultra-modern in technic, medieval in their yearnings, and mystical in vision and insight.

The fact that Ezra Pound, a poet "known to hold theories which some people think new, and which several people know to be hostile to much that hitherto has been accepted as 'classic' in English poetry," [20] was chosen to write the preface to a 1915 edition of the poems of Lionel Johnson means something. Mr. Pound says with constitutional iconoclasm in that

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[20] L. Johnson, *Poems*, 6.

Preface: "For Milton and Victorianism and for the softness of the 'nineties' I have different degrees of antipathy or even contempt." But for Johnson he had tolerance and praise. He says: "One thinks that his poems are in short hard sentences. The reality is that they are full of definite statement. For better or worse they are doctrinal and nearly always dogmatic. He had the blessed habit of knowing his own mind, and this was rare among writers of his decade."

Unfortunately, neither Bridges nor Pound understood at all the spirituality of the poets they sponsored. Bridges laments the "exaggerated Marianism" of some of Hopkins' poems and Pound finds Johnson's devotion only a vehicle for good art, and indication of their own limitations as poets.

The sadness that was a plaint in Christina Rossetti is pathos touched with fear, almost blasted by despair in Johnson. His thirty-five short years were crowded with capacities enough for suffering to break a stronger heart.

One hears a wistful loneliness in "A Cornish Night":

From weariness to weariness I tread;
And hunger for the end, the end of all.

"Cadgwith" is athrill with yearning for heaven:

Ah, how the City of our God is fair!
If, without sea, and starless though it be,
For joy of the majestic beauty there,
Men shall not miss the stars, nor mourn the sea.

One must be in love with God, indeed, to write such things of Him as these, or to sing of His other lovers thus:

Ah, see the fair chivalry come, the companions of Christ!
White horsemen, who ride on white horses, the Knights of God!
They, for their Lord and their Lover who sacrificed
All, save the sweetness of treading where He first trod.

Any one who thinks that religious poetry is compounded of pious nouns and loving adjectives should read "Te Martyrum Candidatus."

If ever a poet had an angel of Satan to buffet him, it was Johnson. One knows it from "A Precept of Silence"; and is terribly sure of it in "The Dark Angel" whom he defies in the name of the Most High:

I fight thee, in the Holy Name!
Do what thou wilt, thou shalt not so,
Dark Angel! triumph over me!
Lonely, unto the Lone I go;
Divine, to the Divinity.

Himself a sum of spiritual intensities, Johnson found it impossible to segregate them. Ireland, the classic past, loneliness, his friends all possessed his heart and his songs, but he wrote of them all from God's point of view. The pupil of Pater, the critic of Hardy, the friend of Thompson, he stands in all his precocious fineness and æsthetic susceptibilities, the exquisite, lone singer with his sheaf of songs,

perfect and chosen fruit of such sowings as only his austere soul knew.

Once in a handful of centuries, religion and poetry dedicate to God such a child of their wedded ecstasy as Francis Thompson. Utterly unable to follow his own precept, Lionel Johnson could write for him, "Lift up your heart." Exaltation was the habit of Thompson's mind and even sorrow he sang from the mountain top of elate and heavenly vision. Critics have not left much to be said about the glory of his imagery, the dizzy boldness of his speech. They have not begun to explain him, however, half so well as does his own statement: "To be a poet of the return to Nature is somewhat but I would be a poet of the return to God." [21] "Ex Ore Infantium" is the baby talk of that return; "The Hound of Heaven" is its mature and candid autobiography. And the meaning, or whatever part of it has counterpart in words, is the theme of "Sight and Insight." This is an ultimate word

[21] E. Meynell, *Life of Francis Thompson,* 205.

in mystical poetry beyond which the language or vision of this generation will hardly pass.

Founded on the paradox of a God-Man, Christianity is naturally full of contradictions. The luminous and flashing insight into their truth is the peculiar talent of the mystic. Hence, to speak in paradox is but to utter the obvious, to him. It is not a process in cancellation equaling nothing but a sum in addition equaling Truth. Here one has it as Thompson and every mystic from the days of Henoch knew it:

Learn to water joy with tears,
Learn from fears to vanquish fears,
To hope, for thou dar'st not despair,
Exult, for that thou dar'st not grieve;
Plough the rock until it bear;
Know, for thou else couldst not believe;
Lose, that the lost thou may'st receive;
Die, for none other way canst live.[22]

No poet has looked farther than Thompson and sung; the language for the things that lie

[22] F. Thompson, *Complete Poems*, 183.

beyond is silence. Earth, life, the soul, the Church, himself are wedded to God, in a very ecstasy of love. All creation is a multiple mirror, dedicated to the reflection of these unions. The suffering of so divine an intimacy he confesses repeatedly, especially in "The Dread of Height."

But ah! withal,
Some hold, some stay,
Of difficult joy, I pray,

he protests:

Ah, for a heart less native to high Heaven,

and

My flesh doth know the heart-perturbing thing;
That dread theology alone
Is mine,
Most native and mine own.

It is not necessary to go on further trying to empty the ocean of such song into this little

patch of sand; enough to cite from "Retrospect" his regret for any singing that was not of God, by which he reconsecrates all to Him:

Therefore I do repent
I have my music bent
To waste on bootless things its skiey-gendered rain:
Yet shall a wiser day
Fulfill more heavenly way
And with approved music clear this slip,
I trust in God most sweet.
Meantime the silent lip,
Meantime the climbing feet.

Francis Thompson pushed language to its ultimate capacities for the praise of things divine; he sang not only of the return to God but of entire capitulation, and for matching sublimity of theme with sublimity of expression, he stands first in his own and many centuries.

Time, with unwonted graciousness, has given the fruit of Alice Meynell's poetry to the pres-

ent generation; its bud and blossom belong, however, to the past. Limits, but not limitations, was the method of her life. She was the poet "of one mood," she said, which seems a selfish thing, the mood being what it was. She is as circumscribed as Christina Rossetti, and less communicative. In the expression of her austere restraint she is not a religious poet nor a mystic. She lacks the first essential which is abandonment, and the second which is vision. So much did her renouncement deny her. But when she sets aside, ever so slightly, this compact with her rigorous self, the voices of what she might have done in wider ways clamor for expression, and then she writes: "I Am the Way," "The Unknown God," "A General Communion," "The Young Neophyte." She is as careful in her speech as Johnson, and very much colder. Her singing is of the mind, which, in conspiracy with the will, forestalled her heart from singing of God as it would. Yet she is almost the most beloved of all this group who, together, make such a company of

mystical poets as English literature had not known for more than a century.

Gifted as these singers were with an understanding of other-worldliness, they were also keen, far-sighted chroniclers of their own day. Hopkins' excursions into the new poetry are still in advance of modern verse; Johnson sang of the Ireland of his day and ours as Singe and Yeats have hardly done; Thompson's "Lilium Regis" was almost a literal prophecy of the Great War, though written a decade at least before. The Rossettis were themselves a part of the spirit of the Victorian period. Alice Meynell constantly records the events of her day, as in "Messina, 1908," and in "Portugal, 1912." Her last book, *A Father of Women,* grew almost wholly out of her reaction to the war. It was precisely because they understood so thoroughly the time in which they lived that they found it so slight a distraction to divert them from singing their faith in God.

The nineteenth century has done much to

destroy or to discredit faith, but simultaneously it has harbored in its household these men and women who not only believed in God but made it the business of their lives to tell of their personal love of Him. Not all in this group can be called mystics in the exact sense, or in the highest sense. But they are so in the spirit of their poetry and in the expression of an attitude that is neither merely doctrinal nor devotional. They resemble no one so much as they do one another, and the point of resemblance is their intimate and individual expression of their spiritual life. They are the second of the two groups of poets who, in the past century, best expressed its religious spirit.

Other names might be added; John Davidson of whom Johnson expected so much; Dowson and Wilde, with the poetic fruits of late conversion; and Stephen Phillips, with the lovely promise of his early poems unfulfilled. But the multiplication of names only reënforces a case which is pretty well supported by its major exponents.

V

For this discussion let there be an epilogue which says: Here, then, is the nineteenth century, a strange composite, mothered by smugness, fathered by revolt, himself the parent of atheistic evolution and Catholic revival, of pessimist and mystic. Tutored in the schools of nature, Greek culture, German philosophy, and English hero worship, blown about by winds of French rationalism and materialism, he yet hears the call of a longer inheritance of holiness and faith. Torn between skepticism and sanctity, he hears a host of voices singing of the one Teacher he has questioned most:

Thou art the Way.
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,
I cannot say
If Thou hadst ever met my soul .
I cannot see—
I, child of process, if there lies
An end for me,
Full of repose, full of replies.

I'll not reproach
The road that winds, my feet that err.
Access, Approach art Thou,
Time, way, and wayfarer.[23]

Whether he heeds the voices or not, who shall say?

A well-known story of St. Catherine of Sienna tells of the violent temptations with which the saint was frequently assailed. Once, after she had waged the battle of the spirit for long, and peace was restored to her soul, she spoke to Christ, her Lord, in this wise: "Where wast Thou, Lord, when I was so grievously assaulted with temptations and doubts, even of Thee?" And Christ made answer: "All the while that thou wast fighting so valiantly I was in the midst of thy heart."

Which thing is spoken in parable.

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[23] A. Meynell, *Poems*, 28.

"WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MY PRETTY MAID?"

"WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MY PRETTY MAID?"

I

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY has been, for a decade past, one of our most diverting poets. One wonders, as he watches her maturing work, whether she will not become something more. The popularity of her poetry has rested unduly on its "Panlike quality," its "impudent philosophy," perishable trappings, proper to youth and bound to pass with it. But under these are an instinct for beauty, the technic to capture it, an equilibrium of mind and emotion that go to make enduring song. One wonders where the bright trinity will lead.

Renascence, Miss Millay's first book of verse, celebrated a mystical rebirth, an awakening to nature, and a supersaturation with

beauty. Then came *A Few Figs from Thistles,* witty, arrogant, and outspoken, which gave the girl poet a reputation for flippancy beyond her desire, one would think. For presently there followed *Second April,* singing her renewed allegiance to nature and to beauty. Then quite suddenly, to the public at least, a sequence of sonnets appeared that were consequential enough for a novel and so deeply rooted in New England soil that they might have been done by Robert Frost. All of our Q.E.D. conclusions about Edna St. Vincent Millay having been for a third time upset, we ask her in dead earnest, "Where are you going, my pretty maid?"

II

Whatever singing road this blithe girl may choose, she has been led by beauty until now—"waylaid by beauty," as she says; the beauty of the world that she cannot withstand, that lures her on resistlessly:

blue hill, still silver lake,
Broad field, bright flower, and the long white road,
A gateless garden, and an open path:
My feet to follow, and my heart to hold.

With almost precocious alertness to the dangers of excess, she has accustomed herself to the ultimate intensities of beauty, and like one

who day by day unto his draught
Of delicate poison adds him one drop more

has become inured to it until she can

drink—and live—what had destroyed some men.

The beauty of nature has beset her first. She sings of it almost in ecstasy; "God's World" is the canticle of a mystic:

O World, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies,
Thy mists that roll and rise!

. . . Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year!
My soul is all but out of me—let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

The soul of loveliness has wrapped her out of herself, has almost intoxicated one proof against inebriation.

Against the danger of such excess she chooses the artifice of simple technic and the strength of mental poise. One feels that her poetry should be judged by its lyric qualities. But as indicative of her power and possible future achievement, it must be rated by these sterner tests. It is precisely her ability to restrain rather than to free, to balance rather than to heap up emotions that will set her yet plastic loveliness into the mold of strength and great beauty. A quality of asceticism is needed, a power to forego, to relinquish. It is incipient here:

I will be the gladdest thing
Under the sun!

I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pluck one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds
With quiet eyes,
Watch the wind bend down the grass
And the grass rise.

And when the lights begin to show
Up from the town,
I will mark which must be mine,
And then start down!

Simultaneously she has caught the heart of nature by renouncing too palpable possession of it, and achieved the essence of poetry by refusing the accident of ornament. It is not often that a young poet looks so equally with mind and emotion at the object of his love, and finds such artless art in which to tell of what he thus beholds.

This poem fairly illustrates the three qualities of Miss Millay's poetry, the three strong tools with which she has to work for permanence; exceeding sensitiveness to beauty, sim-

plicity of technic which is the technic of simplicity, and a fine balance between thought and feeling.

Times she is not restrained, or simple, or level headed; notably in the dizzy, daring "Bean-Stalk," wildest, most typical of her poems, the bold biography of her headlong imagination in its gay climb up the sky. The poem is a swaying, reeling one, blown about by the winds of free verse but held taut by perfect rimes at every point. Breathlessly it begins:

Ho, Giant! This is I!
I have built me a bean-stalk into your sky!
La, but it's lovely, up so high!

the most graceless, graceful, bewildering, and matter-of-fact of adventures. By every token of its apparent lawlessness it points the primrose path to the poet's possible destruction, abandonment of an ecstatic imagination to less wholesomely alluring ventures of the day. But always an instinctive, beautiful poise forestalls

a misstep. "The Concert," a recent poem, is an even more bewilderingly lovely and elusive example of the poet's quiet control of thought and feeling and legitimate technic beneath an apparently abandoned style.

Another pitfall there is in the way of her flying feet, the trap of her own versatility. Already she has stumbled into it. She imitates with dangerous facility. She began in the manner of Anna Hempstead Branch; just now Robert Frost appears to be her model; a half dozen sonneteers and lyricists have come between. Imitation is the privilege of the young, a method commendable and well authorized. But when the imitations turn out to be prettier than the originals, as is so often true of Miss Millay's lyrics, there is the danger not only of forgetting that they are imitations, but of being satisfied with such. Her susceptibility extends to the form, no less than the spirit in which she writes; she has followed conservatively in blank verse, epigrammatic lyrics, and excellent sonnets the more erratic course of

contemporary American poetry along practically the same broad path. All of which is legitimate. It is more of a compliment than a criticism to importune her to blaze a trail that is her own, to speak, however haltingly, in a voice that is not an echo.

III

Carl Van Doren has said of Miss Millay, in criticism of her poetry which refers unquestionably to *A Few Figs from Thistles,* "She reveals women as they are, not as they are supposed to be." The service might have been valuable, had the world been in even a comfortable twilight about either subject. She has done a much healthier thing; she has let a gust of gay and impudent laughter in upon the feverish sentimentalism of the day. This is the way the wind blows:

I shall forget you presently, my dear,
So make the most of this, your little day,

Your little month, your little half a year,
Ere I forget, or die, or move away.

. . . . . .

I would indeed that love were longer lived
And vows were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break this far—
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

A vigorous, healthy blast! A season of such winds might blow the minds of literary folk free from pathology and therapeutics.

A Few Figs from Thistles is a serious, albeit a very witty book. "To the Not Impossible He" and "The Unexplorer" sting with their satire the restlessness and the smugness with which life is beset; the much quoted "Thursday" combats fickleness with its own weapons. Altogether, Miss Millay has gathered dexterously among the brambles of social life, a field where stronger hands are needed for reaping. It has been a venture for her and has not gone beyond the limits of a mood.

One almost hopes it will not do so; satire with such art as hers will yield more power as a force than as a form.

IV

To judge the poetry of Miss Millay by her sonnets may seem like measuring a bird's songs by a metronome. She has become so much a synonym for lyric caprice, quick-witted poetic repartee that readers have been distracted by her tricks from her performances. Many of her sonnets are distinctly literary performances; all of them are sober indications of what she may be at her future best. They speak the familiar sonnet language of love and beauty with fluency and force. They leave no doubt at all as to the poet's accuracy of speech but they do leave doubt as to the conviction behind that speech. They give the impression that ability to express, more than the power to feel, has gone into their making, which is an injustice to Miss Millay's real capacities. Too

many moods and styles are reflected. That of Rossetti is conspicuous and yet, one feels, it is not the one to which she will yield finally. "Sonnets of an Ungrafted Tree" in *The Harp Weaver* makes one sure of this.

Here, in a sequence of seventeen sonnets, Miss Millay has struck out into a new field with a new model. Robert Frost is unquestionably her teacher, and whether or not one prefers the music and fancy of her lyrics, he knows that she has got beyond loveliness at last. Her theme, as it stands, is the plot for a novel. The story, cut from the sonnets, is briefly this:

So she came back into his house again
And watched beside his bed until he died,
Loving him not at all.

One single and sufficient incident is supplied:

A wagon stopped before the house; she heard
The heavy oilskins of the grocer's man
Slapping against his legs. Of a sudden whirred
Her heart like a frightened partridge.

And then, against the monotony of days and years

There was rapture of a decent kind
In making mean and ugly objects fair,

such as attiring "*the shelves in paper petticoats.*"

The years between are silent; one fills them in with the quiet tragedy of a woman's high-hearted acceptance of what is for what might have been. Details of the husband's illness are unrecorded, except for this epitome of devotion:

Tenderly in those times
She gave her husband of her body's strength,
Thinking of men, what helpless things they were.

And after all is over and she stands

Gazing upon him now, severe and dead
She was as one that enters, shy and proud,

To where her husband speaks before a crowd,
And sees a man she never saw before,

. . . . . .

Small, and absurd, and hers; for once, not hers,
unclassified.

Here is, indeed, a departure not only from Miss Millay's other sonnets but from her other poetry, her other self. Until now she has been her own leading lady; here she has stepped off the stage completely to record the drama in which another woman has the lead. Her elimination of self is sudden, complete, and successful. She has freed herself from the chief encumbrance to real work. For always, one feels, there has been between her ability and its best expression, the supple plasticity of Edna St. Vincent Millay herself. She seems to have lost that here, unless, indeed, her pliancy has merely lent itself to this mold of strength.

The sonnets in this group are not flawless; harsh sounds, crude figures startle one, even though they may be deliberate:

Locusts rising raspingly,

Garments, board stiff that galloped in the blast
Clashing like angel armies in a fray.

But against these one sets such other realism as this:

. . . And the blue night stood.
Flattened against the window, staring through,

and forgives the slip.

The sonnet form used in the sequence is the target at which most darts of criticism will be aimed. Seventeen sonnets with uniform couplet endings of seven feet is not a license that tape measurers of meter are going to tolerate without a protest. Neither the story nor the poetry suffers from the spurious feet, but the form—aye, there's the rub—and deliberately to adopt the sonnet as one's medium is tacitly to respect its form. Miss Millay has been a ravisher here. However, "Sonnets of an Ungrafted Tree" are the best good work, the nearest great work she has done.

V

One always runs the risk, in looking at a thing too closely, of seeing it too large. To-day Miss Millay looks important poetically. It may be that we are too near to her. It may be that she has done her best work. All of which suppositions err, probably, on the side of conservatism. These things can be said for her: she has kept her head amid all the turbulent and wayward winds of free and erratic verse, she has withstood unguessed temptations to be clever rather than true, and she has reached in a decade a poetic stature half a head above a goodly number of contemporary poets. Her weakness lies in her strength—she is versatile. She adapts herself too easily to the forms and moods of the day. She can be mystical, epigrammatic, flippant, serious, dramatic. She can be neat and sweet and beautiful, and she usually is. Facility is a more perilous gift than ability. Miss Millay

has both. Beauty, technic, poise she has. Whether she will rub her golden mind into a mirror for the reflection of loveliness or round it into a crucible for life, one wonders.

THE FAMILIAR ESSAY IN COLLEGE ENGLISH

THE FAMILIAR ESSAY IN COLLEGE ENGLISH

THE family of the Alphabet has, indeed, multiplied and filled the whole earth, and of all its numerous offspring the Familiar Essay is the very darling, "an Ariel among literary kind, an aristocrat of letters."[1] Yet, it is rather the least familiar of literary forms. The short story, for example, is more widely read and the drama more exhaustively and more carefully studied. The human interest in these two forms accounts for their popularity, but there is a set of values in the essay which deserves much more consideration than it receives. The familiar essay is essentially a creative form of prose expression in that it takes thought rather than persons or events for its subject-matter. This establishes the

[1] R. Burton, *Forces in Fiction*, 99.

worthiness of its cause. Secondly, it enjoys a certain freedom from technique—it is its own form. There is little in the familiar essay that corresponds to plot in the short story or to structure in the drama. The student has to consider only the thought and its manner of expression. By giving exclusive attention to these two important elements of English, for however short a time, he will begin at least to develop flexibility of thought, naturalness, and adequacy of expression, qualities which he may well cultivate. In its critical and classic forms the essay is often beyond the capacity and the taste of the ordinary reader; but the familiar essay, in its exaltation of such homely subjects as Roast Pig and Poor Relations, is surely catholic enough in its appeal. It falls easily within the ability of any student and can be made a very profitable, albeit supplementary, part of his English work.

Such a frank egoist is the familiar essay that it needs no introduction; it presents itself with no credentials other than its own happy

personality and winsome manner. But inquiry into its family history and pedigree discovers that it is sprung from the fine old family of Montaigne, whose literary motto ran, "Myselfe am the groundwork of my booke." The authors of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator,* with Cowley and Sir Thomas Browne, were among its most influential ancestors, and Hazlitt and "that light-horse soldier, Goldsmith," were its immediate forbears. Lamb was a prince of this house, and at his death both title and mantle fell to the happy lot of the intense, romantic Stevenson. The familiar or personal essay is the youngest of the essay family and marks its final and most happy development. It bears resemblance to both the classic essay and the short story essay, but is less scholarly than the former and more personal than the latter. It is the most intimate, the most natural, the most creative, and, for all these reasons, the most thoroughly delightful form of prose. Many of our best writers have employed it at some time or other to make open

confession of matters too egoistical or subjective, or too informal for more pretentious treatment. None of them have had quainter, wiser, or more friendly things to say through this medium or have said them more perfectly than Lamb and Stevenson. This study of the personal essay in connection with college English confines itself, therefore, to these two essayists, for the twofold reason that if only two can be studied, they should be the best two, and that what is true of them will be true in varying degrees of all essayists of this type.

Description is ordinarily the first subject taught in freshman English. If, after having gone over the preparatory work, the teacher wishes to supplement the text assignments, he will find admirable material in "The South Sea House" from *Essays of Elia.* For humanly suggestive description one could hardly find anything better than this. "The very clerks . . . formed a sort of Noah's ark. Odd fishes. A lay monastery. Domestic retainers in a great House, kept more for show

than for use. Yet pleasant fellows, full of chat, and not a few among them had arrived at considerable proficiency on the German flute." Epigram, apostrophe, punctuation usher in and out from among the "dusty dead" the quaint, old-fashioned bachelor clerks of the South Sea House. The house itself is a challenge to imitation, and that imagination is dull, indeed, which would not wish to add a twentieth century bookkeeper or two to this group of eighteenth century ghosts.

"A Quakers' Meeting" is description, exposition, and narration all in one. Immediately it invites a many-sided comparison with the chapter on "The Monks" from *Travels with a Donkey*. There is the same setting of religion, the same atmosphere of recollection, the same enveloping and active silence. It would be hard to say whether the reader is more happy over the resemblances or the differences that come to meet him down parallel roads. Here are a pair: the first, "a man of giant stature, who might have danced 'from head to foot

equipped in iron mail.' 'He had been a wit in his youth,' he told us, with expressions of sober remorse." The other is "Father Michael, a pleasant, fresh-faced, smiling man . . . who listened to my prattle indulgently enough, . . . like a spirit with a thing of clay. . . . But his manner, though superior, was exquisitely gracious; and I find I have a lurking curiosity as to Father Michael's past."

"A Character of the Late Elia," though semi-narrative in character, can be used to good advantage in studying description. The paragraph beginning, "My late friend . . ." is one in particular that suggests endless possibilities for imitation.

The compliment of imitation that Stevenson paid to Lamb, the student may well pay to him. He says: "Description was the principal field of my exercises," [2] and "Walking Tours" is only one example of the perfection to which his practice brought him. One can learn from it how to walk as well as how to write; it is a

[2] R. L. Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits*, 58.

miniature Don Quixote for pedestrians; it puts a person on his feet and sends him out for a cross-country jaunt in pursuit of the romance of the commonplace, and brings him back to write of his adventure with life and zest. "An Autumn Effect" can be used to like advantage and adjusted, for imitation, to any season of the year. A winter effect or a spring effect could be given as a class exercise after reading this essay.

A certain perforation of memory and porosity of mind are conditions commonly met with among students, perhaps induced by literary overfeeding. An old-fashioned remedy for these conditions comes in the form of an old-fashioned assignment of reading for reproduction. To the question of what to read one can hardly receive a happier answer than "A Night Among the Pines." Reading it is next to experiencing it, but as for that, we shall let Stevenson speak for himself. He will not let you miss a single velvet sensation of the waking or sleeping night. Better, he will not let

you forget one, either. You put the essay down with the feeling of having all but experienced it. So the task of reproduction resolves itself to a matter of pen and paper, and the psychologist will tell you that the mental sieve is on the way to become waterproof, or literally fact-proof.

But "A Night Among the Pines" comes to an end, and when one awakes to find the English day at hand, it is well to awake still in the country where *Travels with a Donkey* has brought him. For the literary Baedeker contains directions to proceed directly from description to narration, and here one has at hand such narration as he would not come upon in a day's journey through a library. Simple, straightforward narrative is a thing to be received with appreciation and even gratitude in these plot-ridden days of the short story and the novelette. To read *Travels with a Donkey* is to make a journey more subjective, more joyous, in a number of ways more unimpeded than the one recorded; and to approach

the manner of its telling is to have acquired something very definite and desirable in style. If, perchance, time presses and one can not spend the whole twelve days nor journey the entire hundred and twenty miles with Stevenson and the precocious Modestine, "Our Lady of the Snows" offers endless possibilities both in hospitality and English. Who could cheaply dream of sophisticating with plot "Father Appolinaris" or "The Monks"; who could question the charm of simple narrative to which they owe their literary existence; or who could not, for very fun, produce half a dozen spontaneous parallels to "The Boarders"?

Following the path of narrative one returns, without traveling in a circle, to Lamb and "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig." The reader is quite helpless to do more than read and enjoy with all his humorous heart and mind this extravagant, irresponsible farce. Imitation or reproduction is useless. But when a student has read this much of the inimitable Lamb he has had a delightfully profitable lesson in Eng-

lish, and can hardly approach the subject any longer from the dead level of monotony.

Lamb's life is the explanation of his writing; his essays are an elaborate play to dispel the "blues," and the tragedy behind them makes their foolishness sublime. No family closet has ever sheltered more pathetic skeletons than his. They both gain and lose in tragedy under the smile of his quaint humor. One might expect Lamb to retire into a bitter and despondent silence about his family, but how he talks of it! "Poor Relations" is, among other things, a study in epigram, and "My Relations" is unadulterated delight. What with his aunts, his "male aunts," and his inexplicable cousins, one wonders if ever there was another family quite so interesting as Lamb's, and immediately begins to call the roll of his own relations. Here is a theme subject at hand. Why not write on My Relations? Or if one does not wish to be personal, there is "Mrs. Battle's Opinion on Whist." The essay is a model of clear and interesting narra-

tive; the character of Mrs. Battle is so definitely drawn as to indicate her possible views on woman suffrage or higher education for women, or her opinion on Red Cross work might easily be volunteered by the wide-awake student.

But do not dismiss Lamb in connection with narration without meeting Jem White in "The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers." There are a dozen irrepressible and sooty preliminaries before the entrance of this "vast, substantial smile" of essay folk, and after having watched him play the double rôle of host and head waiter at his own annual dinner for chimney-sweepers, one is quite ready to believe that "he carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died." Something of the substantial, large-hearted homeliness of this very informal affair—whether it be the hospitality or the smell of sausages—reminds one of the prosperous home of old Baltus Van Tassel and suggests a comparison between this essay and Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

The subject of literary exposition, usually the least interesting to the student, is rich in illustrations from the familiar essay. Unliterary explanations are ordinarily tiresome when they are not openly embarrassing. No subject could offer more opportunities for embarrassment than "Valentine's Day." Yet Lamb is quite quaint and simple in his exposition. "This is the day," he says, "on which those charming little missives, ycleped Valentines, cross and intercross each other at every street and turning. The weary and all forespent postman sinks beneath a load of delicate embarrassments, not his own." His epithet for the heart, "that little three-cornered exponent of all our hopes and fears," is as nice a divorce between emotion and physiology as literature is likely to achieve.

"Old China" is another of Lamb's essays which will serve to disillusion the student as to the dullness of exposition, and surprise him into an actual interest in the possibilities of the commonplace. Its sincere and earnest apology

for poverty is the more appealing because it is a part of the elaborate game of make-believe which Lamb was always playing. The twentieth-century boy or girl is not accustomed to regard a cheap seat in the theater as a luxury or a rare copy of an old book as an absolute joy. These points of view Lamb makes inevitable. Agnes Repplier has given the same subject a more economic treatment in "My Lady Poverty," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for October, 1914.

"The Sanity of True Genius" possesses less of that quaint eccentricity of style that is Lamb than most of his essays, for which reason it may fall more within the range of student capacities. It represents direct and vigorous exposition; it is coherent and concise, and furnishes excellent preparatory work for the acquirement of these qualities. The droll, amusingly philosophical, scriptural Lamb reappears in "The Two Races of Men." With one sweep of his topic sentence he separates all humanity into two classes, the men who lend and the men

who borrow, and then, with the assurance of a sophist, proceeds to make the worse appear the better cause. The essay fairly bristles with interest, especially for the English student. It adapts itself to reproduction at almost every paragraph, and invites parody on such subjects as The Punctual and the Tardy, The Orderly and the Disorderly, The Great and the Near Great.

A special interest attaches to the literary tastes of writers and their preferences in the matter of books. "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading" satisfies this interest and suggests to the reader the expression of his own opinion on the same subject, on magazine reading, or on other phases of current fiction.

Life is a quest within a quest; childhood has scarcely given up its search for the end of the rainbow when there is some golden fleece or Holy Grail for youth to seek. El Dorado is the fair, far city of the errant world, and Stevenson's journey there, as set forth in his essay, "El Dorado," is a gallant, happy pilgrim-

age. It leads through a somewhat unfrequented path of fancy, up quick, sure steps of epigram and aphorism until "it seems to you, you must come forth on some conspicuous hill-top, and against the setting sun, descry the spires of El Dorado." The essay is as brave as the bravest of Stevenson's personal writings and more hopeful than some. Its strength and vigor of style can be better felt than described, and as the student reads it, he comes to realize that language in itself can possess a beauty apart from the thought it must express.

Burton's definition of the essay as "a literary creature to the making of which go mood and form" [3] is perfectly illustrated in "Aes Triplex." The mood is the consideration of death and the form is English without reproach. Recognize the fine appropriateness for death of the epithet, "God's pale Praetorian"; appreciate the neat truthfulness of the sentence, "We confound ourselves with metaphysical phrases which we import into daily talk with

[3] R. Burton, *Forces in Fiction*, 99.

noble inappropriateness"; and read out of the spontaneous last paragraph such courage as would have made an optimist of Napoleon on St. Helena. The essay can be used admirably as a reading assignment with the additional requirement of a paragraph on any thought suggested by it. Very good short themes can be developed from such topic sentences as these: "We do not go to cowards for tender dealing," or "It is better to live and be done with it than to die daily in the sick room."

There is an immediateness and a fine self-consciousness in Stevenson, due perhaps to the pressure of approaching death. It pervades "Crabbed Age and Youth" and lets slip the tell-tale ejaculation, "if I'm spared," quite as a God-fearing grandmother might do. This essay of Stevenson's should be praised for an uncommon quantity of common sense. Enthusiasm is canonized in the word, "if St. Paul had not been a very zealous Pharisee, he would have been a colder Christian." Credulity smarts under the epitome, "some people swal-

low the universe like a pill." Almost any paragraph of the essay can be used as an exercise in reproduction, and while thus teaching ambitious youth to write gracefully, may perchance teach him at the same time to grow old gracefully.

Whereas death and a serious consideration of it, even with the courage of a Stevenson, are uninviting subjects to the young, "An Apology for Idlers" is aimed at the very heart of youth. It is a panegyric on its besetting weakness and the exaltation of it almost to the realm of virtue. Who believes more firmly than the average freshman that "books are good enough in their own way, but they are a mighty bloodless substitute for life"? Here is a subject with which the normal student is in perfect sympathy. Let him express his agreement in such subjects as "A Profitable Idleness," or "The Busyness of Life." Let him imitate carefully the paragraph on the duty of being happy with expositions on the duty of being one's best self or the duty of being Amer-

ican. Any number of variations will suggest themselves to the versatile teacher and will be met by a near approach to pleasure on the part of the class. The discretion of the teacher and the maturity of the students will determine the treatment of a certain lack of faith which asserts itself particularly at the end of the essay. The conclusion chills, not because of the ascribed credulity of youth but because of the actual scepticism of the author.

The present steam-heated generation regards the days of wood fires and tallow dips with romantic tolerance, and "A Plea for Gas Lamps" sounds as absurdly old-fashioned as a plea for hour glasses or periwigs. Other variations of the primordial "Let there be light" may be more spectacular than this truly familiar essay; none is more sweetly possessed of the qualities of domesticated romance. When one has become familiar with the ejaculation, "God bless the lamp-lighter," and has watched him in imagination speeding through the streets with his "vagabond Pharos" knock-

ing luminous holes in the dusk, he begins to think with enthusiasm of the possibilities of "A Plea for Daylight" or "The Case of the Lightning Bug."

Stevenson has blazed one trail to a comparative Utopia in his essay "On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places." The guide post reads: "Things looked at patiently from one side after another generally end by showing a side that is beautiful," and the landscape opens onto a level, treeless plateau where one is lashed with a whip of sea wind along a stretch of naked, bleak monotony. But these bitter, hard, persistent winds have their merit, the writer says, and verifies it by this fine observation in English to match, "It is pleasant to see them brandish the shadows." The elevation of the plateau has also its panoramic merit, and not only landscape but life stretches away before it. And the reader joins the writer in his meditation when he says, "And on those days the thought of the wind and the thought of human life came very near together in my

mind. Our noisy years did indeed seem moments in the being of eternal silence; and the wind, in the face of that great field of stationary blue, was as the wind of a butterfly's wing." The essay is seriously thoughtful, which recommends it the more in that the habit of thought does not ordinarily assume the proportions of a malady in young people, and such provocation to it may lead to their making the most of such pleasant places as school and home.

With the subject of argumentation, the familiar essay has little in common. The two are so directly opposed in matter and in manner that either could be used only in a negative way to show what the other is not. Subjects and moods of a personal or literary essay end where proper material for argumentation begins. The critical essay and many forms of the oration are either forms of argumentation or furnish more appropriate supplements to it.

If the familiar essay has little in common with argumentation, it has everything but rime and rhythm in common with poetry, or at least

with its metrical counterpart, the lyric. The lyric is the unveiling of the poet's self, the passionate revelation of the lone and restive soul which is at once the white hot furnace and the molten song. The thought of thought or feeling is the essence of the lyric, and since thought and feeling are the most immaterial of realities, the lyric approaches most nearly the creative act of making something out of nothing material. The thought, the feeling, the emotion, which are its life, are the poet's own; hence of the poet it must sing. It is of the writer and with like intimate egoism that the essay speaks. So alike are the two forms that the matter of saying or singing is frequently all that distinguishes them, and the emotional intensity which may condense itself into six lyric lines can be found distributed with economy and effect over three pages of personal prose. If you doubt the lyric possibilities of prose, read Lamb's "Dream Children," and if you question the "airy nothings" to which it can give a local habitation and a name in the essay,

consider the conclusion of the reverie: "We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of the millions of ages before we have existence and a name." And then if you wish to anticipate these waiting years, turn to "The Children's Hour" of Longfellow and let that trilogy of childhood burst in upon you with the golden hair and laughter of young life, tangible, demonstrative, and real. Even the name of the living Alice runs through the dream of Lamb, though the Alice of dreams is older by some decades. But "The Children's Hour" does not touch the heart of "Dream Children." "The Poppy" by Francis Thompson, "this withering flower of dreams," finds its uttermost sweet pain of meaning. The spirit of the two settings is described by the same stanza:

A child and a man paced side by side,
Treading the skirts of eventide;
But between the clasp of his hand and hers
Lay, felt not, twenty withered years.

Lamb says of the fair-haired dream-child at his knee, "the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment that I became in doubt which of them stood before me, or whose that bright hair was," to which Thompson adds:

And suddenly 'twixt his hand and hers
He knew the twenty withered years.

Low to his heart he said, "The flower
Of sleep brings wakening to me,
And of oblivion memory."

The spirit, after all, is the thing in which the two are most alike; they are both so eloquent of things that might have been; they both reach so far beyond the heart of childhood to the heart of a larger and deeper life.

It is another self, very human and humorous, which Lamb shows one in "Valentine's Day," a self that finds companionship in the lovable spirit of Joyce Kilmer. In fact on reading "A Blue Valentine" one would almost think that Lamb had fallen into the fashion of free verse.

Compare the introduction of the essay with the beginning of the poem: "Hail to thy returning festival, old Bishop Valentine! Great is thy name in the rubric, thou venerable Archflamen of Hymen! Immortal Go-between! Who and what manner of person art thou? Wert thou indeed a mortal prelate, with thy tippet and thy rochet, thy apron on and decent lawn sleeves?" What Lamb lacks of faith, Kilmer supplies, for which reason his poem is more sincere and beautiful. It begins:

Monsignore,
Right Reverend Bishop Valentine,
Sometime of Interamna, which is called Ferni,
Now of the delightful Court of heaven,
I respectfully salute you,
I genuflect
And kiss your episcopal ring.

The two read like question and answer and add a pretty dialogue to the literature of valentines.

"Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading" suggests two good lyrics included in the *Anthology of Magazine Poetry for 1916,*

"Reading Horace" by Robert Underwood Johnson and "Grace before Reading" by Helen Coale Crew. Lamb's love was "of the book." As he says, "I can read anything which I can call a book." As he delights to lose himself "in other men's minds," so Robert Johnson delights to lose himself in Horace. The feeling of personal friendship and enthusiasm for book-folk is common to the two. "Grace before Reading" speaks almost with his own quaintness of "Lamb's dear whimsey," and asks a blessing before reading the very writers that he loved best:

Young Kit Marlowe, sped and spent;
Montaigne, royal gossiper,

Shakespeare, chiefest heart's delight.

Helen Crew also expresses Lamb's love of the book quite as he would have wished:

O God, all praise
For a book, its tears and wit,
Its faults and the perfect joy of it.

Anyone familiar with Lamb cannot read past the title of this happy little lyric without wondering if it is at all like "Grace before Meals." On turning to the essay one is confronted with the question, "Why have we none (no grace) for books, those spiritual repasts—a grace before Milton, a grace before Shakespeare?" And the answer is at hand in the two poems just cited.

"Old China" suggests two comparisons in poetry which together measure the distance between the sublime and the ordinary. Take the descriptions of the figures on the tea set: "Here is a young and courtly Mandarin, handing tea to a lady from a salver. . . . And here the same lady . . . is stepping into a little fairy boat. Farther on . . . see horses, trees, pagodas, dancing the hays. Here . . . a cow and a rabbit couchant, and co-extensive; . . . so objects show, seen through the lucid atmosphere of fine Cathay." Where in literature does one find such a motionless enchanted Arcady as this? One thinks immediately of

Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and finds there something of Lamb's thought, dignified by classic setting and glorified by tumultuous, poetic imagination. Keats sees and asks:

What men or gods are these? What maidens loath?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet do not grieve;
She can not fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?

What little town by river or seashore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk this pious morn?

And so the story of the picture on the urn is sung into one of the finest odes in the language.

There is rather than a classical feeling, a dominant homeliness in Lamb's essay. The praise of poverty, as has already been said, is its real theme, expressed in this way: "I wish the good old times would come again, when we were not quite so rich. . . . Do you remember our pleasant walks to Enfield . . . when we had a holiday—holidays and all other fun are gone, now we are rich. There was a pleasure in eating strawberries before they became quite common, . . . in the first dish of peas, while they were yet dear . . . to have them for a nice supper, a treat. What treat can we have now?" James Whitcomb Riley has sung of poverty in the same wholesome, honest way. In "Griggsby's Station" he says:

Pap's got his patent-right, and rich as all creation;
But where's the peace and comfort that we all had before?
Le's go a-visitin' back to Griggsby's station—
Back where we ust to be so happy and so pore!

What's in all this grand life and high situation,
And nary pink or hollyhawk a-bloomin' at the door?
Le's go a-visitin' back to Griggsby's station—
Back where we ust to be so happy and so pore!

The lyric quality of "Griggsby's Station" may be questioned; to the ordinary person it contains more depth of human feeling than Keats' ode, and emotion is emotion, whether it finds expression in splendid figures or plain vernacular. The fact that these two very different poems meet on common ground in "Old China" is itself a comment on the scope of Lamb's appeal.

"New Year's Eve" is one of the most autobiographical of all his essays and resembles Stevenson's "Aes Triplex" and "Ordered South" in the character of its admissions. In subject matter it has two parallels in lyric poetry, "Ring Out, Wild Bells," in Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and "New Year's Chimes" by Francis Thompson. The three poems express

characteristic states of mind: there is reluctance in Lamb, reform in Tennyson, and mysticism in Thompson. These three aspects of the new year are interesting, especially when one has the atmosphere of musical language through which to look at them. Of the effect of the New Year's bells on him, Lamb writes: "The sound of those midnight chimes, though it seemed to raise hilarity in all around me, never failed to bring a train of pensive imagery into my fancy." There is even positive regret in the "awful leave-taking" of the old year, for he continues, "I begin to know its worth as when a person dies." Compared to this Tennyson's lines sound almost pitiless:

The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Taken in their context, however, they fall into the fine, patriotic sweep of the poem which

reaches a climax of faith in the concluding line,

Ring in the Christ that is to be,

that Lamb does not approach. But both essay and poem are outstripped in Thompson's "New Year's Chimes." The diverse spirits of the two are variously suggested in subtle, mystic ways repeatedly and are mutually reconciled in the stanza:

And the more ample years unfold

A little new of the ever old,
A little told of the never told,
Added act of the never done.

So essayist, laureate, and mystic meet on the subject of "the nativity of our common Adam."

The humorist and that "shy volcano," Thompson, have another almost uncanny meeting. Lamb writes "To the Shade of Elliston" and Thompson supplies an unconscious parallel in "Buona Notte." Both seek departed souls in the realms of Pluto, but for quite dif-

ferent reasons. Their attitudes of mind are in direct contrast. Lamb addresses the dead actor as "joyousest of once embodied spirits"; Thompson's message is from Ariel to Miranda; the sea winds bear it, taking "grief for their interpreter." To Lamb's almost entirely interrogative conversation as, "What new mysterious lodgings dost thou tenant now? or when may we expect thy aerial house-warming?" the poem supplies such answers as this:

Good-night; I have risen so high
Into slumber's rarity,
Not a dream can beat its feather
Through the unsustaining ether.

Tempests curtained me about:

And though I toss upon my bed
My dream is not disquieted.

Then comes the happy leave-taking of Elliston by Lamb: "Adieu, pleasant and thrice pleasant shade! Rhadamanthus . . . shall courte-

ously dismiss thee at the right-hand gate . . . that conducts to the masks and merrymakings in the Theater Royal of Proserpine." To which replies:

> . . . *that voice desolate,*
> *Mourning ruined joy's estate.—*
>
> *"Go'st thou to Plato?" Ah, girl, no!*
> *It is to Pluto that I go.*

Further comparison of Lamb's essays with lyric poetry would lead to other happy places, but this much is sufficient to illustrate their common mood and interests.

The subject of death was never very far from Stevenson's mind, and some of his most optimistic essays look the unrelenting fact squarely in the face, as may be observed in his "El Dorado," for example. This essay has already been referred to under the subject of Exposition, and it can be used with quite as good effect in relation to at least one lyric on death, "Crossing the Bar" by Tennyson. Although it changes the figure absolutely, it accentuates

the atmosphere of approaching death which dominates the poem. Where the poet hides the sternness of reality under the metaphor, "one clear call for me," the essayist says, "There is only one wish realizable on earth: . . . Death." He exchanges the setting of the sea for the trail of an adventurous pioneer, who, stopping short of the hope "to see his Master face to face," scans the horizon for the chimerical spires of El Dorado. "Aes Triplex" is Stevenson's most direct essay on death and resembles in quality as well as in thought some of the best poems on the subject. His own poem, "Requiem" is, of course, a blood relation. The family resemblance is plain in the lines, "It is better to live and be done with it than to die daily in the sickroom," and

Gladly I live and gladly die,
And I lay me down with a will.

Browning, who also felt strongly and persistently the presence of death, has written about it much as Stevenson has. "Prospice" is

Browning's "Triple Brass." The same question, "Fear death?" is asked and answered by the two with passionate courage. So responsive is Stevenson's prose to his emotion that it produces the same intensity of impression as the poem, which, however, has the advantage of concreteness. The spirit behind it is this: "And even if death catch people, like an open pitfall, and in midcareer, . . . flushed with hope: is there not something brave and spirited in such termination? and does not life go down with a better grace, foaming in full body over a precipice, than miserably straggling to an end in sandy deltas?" Or, as Browning says:

I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past.

The conviction that "death has not been suffered to take so much as an illusion" from such a one is unmistakable in Browning's line:

For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave.

The power of language to express emotion is well illustrated in these two, and the equality and similarity of that power in prose to that of poetry is proved.

Among modern poets Alan Seeger has reflected Stevenson's spirit most faithfully in "I Have a Rendezvous with Death." There is here more of youth, more of the joy of the springtime of life and nature than in "Prospice," and in the first two of these elements, it finds a congenial spirit in "Aes Triplex." Inevitability is the note common to all three. And with what optimism they submit to it! Stevenson writes, "As courage and intelligence are the two qualities best worth a man's cultivation, so it is the first part of intelligence to recognize our precarious estate in life, and the first part of courage to be not at all abashed before the fact. . . . So soon as prudence has begun to grow up in the brain,

. . . it finds its first expression in a paralysis of generous acts. The victim develops a fancy for parlors with a regulated temperature." And Alan Seeger continues:

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented downs.

To the lines which have proved so tragically true,

I have a rendezvous with death
When spring brings back blue days and fair.

"Aes Triplex" supplies these details with singular appropriateness. "The trumpets are scarcely done blowing, when, with trailing clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land."

The attitude of resignation evident in Seeger is replaced by a shadow of defiance in Stevenson which one remembers so well as the moving spirit of Henley's "Invictus." It is something bolder than courage and less inspired than

faith; something like the feeling that prompts the small boy to whistle as he walks through a dark hollow at night, a defiance of fear. It pervades the essay and is summarized in the poem:

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

This "last of the buccaneers," Henley, furnishes a very interesting description of the sick man who appears incognito in Stevenson's "Ordered South." He is no other than the author himself whom Henley calls "The Apparition" in his hospital poems. The sonnet is interesting in supplying intimate details as to the personality and appearance of the man through whose eyes the reader views the enchantment that is Italy. One feels he must have been

Bold-lipped, rich-tinted, mutable as the sea,
The brown eyes radiant with vivacity—

A spirit intense and rare, with trace on trace
Of passion and energy and impudence,

A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,
Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all.

This is the man who looked on the south "with a child's first pleasure, as Wordsworth saw the daffodils by the lakeside." Stevenson himself suggests the comparison and makes it true. The joy that the Lake poet finds in the "host of golden daffodils" he comes upon as suddenly among the olive gardens of northern Italy. It is as if he had awakened to find a whole peninsula of fluttering, dancing flowers stretched out before him, and the panorama leaves him "to gape joyously for days together in the very homeland of the beautiful." Neither invalid nor poet could but be gay

In such a jocund company.

Just here a lovely line from "Ordered South" suggests material for a very suitable verse assignment to a class. It is this: "The

spirit of delight comes often on small wings." The line would almost have to stand as it is in a poem, it could hardly be improved, a fact which incidentally proves the nearness of lyric prose to poetry. And "Ordered South" is one of the most lyrical of essays. Paragraph after paragraph could easily be put into rime and meter; indeed it has already many metrical counterparts. The paragraph beginning, "It is not in such numbness of spirit" is the prose of Coventry Patmore's "Magna Est Veritas." The settings are almost identical. This is the poet's resting-place:

Here, in this little bay,
Full of tumultuous life and great repose,

Under high cliffs, and far from the huge town
I sit me down.

Stevenson seeks the same quiet seclusion, and in the third person "falls out of the eddy that circulates in the shallow waters of the sanitorium. Many a white town that sits far out on the promontory," he continues, "beckons

and allures his imagination . . . and is yet as inaccessible to his feet as the clefts and gorges of the clouds." This is one of the most tranquil and meditative of Stevenson's essays.

Although Browning's poem, "An Epistle," rather outgrows the proportions of a lyric, the impression that it makes is much more lyrical than narrative in character and it is dominated by the same thoughtful indifference to life as "Ordered South." This indifference is due in one instance to the anticipation of eternity, in the other to the remembrance of it. The risen Lazarus, of whom the physician, Karshish, writes, moves through his Judean world with the same far-away, abstracted manner that Stevenson ascribes to the invalid. "Desire after desire leaves him. . . . And yet the ties that still attach him to the world are many and kindly. The sight of children has a significance for him such as it may have for the aged also, but not for others. . . . There remains unaltered all the disinterested hopes for mankind and a better future which have been the

solace and the inspiration of his life." Browning described Lazarus in this very similar way:

He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed; and yet no fool.

The man is apathetic, you deduce?
Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,
Able and weak, affects the very brutes
And birds.

The comparison of these two most subjective and serious aspects of life fills one with deep reverence for both life and death and leaves one with a wish that Stevenson had, like Lazarus, known more of God's secret "while he held the thread of life."

To proceed cheerfully rather than chronologically one turns to "Child's Play" and comes upon the very heart of childhood. One understands the whole of *A Child's Garden of Verse* in the light of the essay and finds much

of it in verse form there. But for a sequel to its tragedy of childhood one goes to Patmore's "Toys." The essayist says: "I would give a great deal to know what, in nine cases out of ten, is a child's unvarnished feeling," and receives something of an explanation in the poet's lines:

I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darkened eyelids and their lashes yet
From their late sobbing wet.

For, on the table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,
And two French coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.

It seems that it must have been of this very child that Stevenson exclaims, "no wonder, poor little heart. . . . The dread irrationality of the whole affair, as it seems to children, is a thing we are all too ready to forget." And his

half-reprimand, "Spare them yet a while, conscientious parent! Let them doze among their playthings yet a little," Patmore applies to himself, and confesses:

And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own.

It may or may not be remarkable that the tenderest poems to childhood have been written by men. Thompson's "Ex Ore Infantium" belongs in spirit and in truth to "Child's Play." Identifying the Divine Child with the world of childhood and making Him a dweller in this place of faith and incongruity he brings all childhood nearer to the kingdom of heaven which is its proper home.

Travels with a Donkey, which has already done good service in illustrating the different prose forms, has two chapters which are particularly lyrical and which can be suggestively used in comparison with poems in the same spirit. "A Night Among the Pines," by its very name, suggests Bourdillon's exquisite

The night has a thousand eyes;

and follows out the suggestion by these lines, "The stars were clear, coloured, and jewel-like, but not frosty. A faint, silvery vapour stood for the Milky Way." The nearness to nature and the added joy of human companionship, which are the emotions of the paragraph beginning "A faint wind . . ." Browning has used for the theme of the poem, "Two in the Campagna." Poet and essayist agree that "to live out of doors with the woman a man loves is of all lives the most complete and free." Nor does their agreement end there. Stevenson awoke from his night among the pines to find that "Day was at hand. . . . Soon there was a broad streak of orange melting into gold along the mountain-tops. A solemn glee possessed my mind at this gradual and lovely coming in of day. . . . Nothing had altered but the light, and that, indeed, shed over all a spirit of life and of breathing peace and moved me to a strange exhilaration." So Pippa must have felt on the morning of her holiday. "Ten

minutes after, the sunlight spread at a gallop along the hillside, scattering shadows and sparkles, and the day had come completely." Just so the little Italian spinner saw "the hillside dew-pearled." And where the traveler, half laughing, left pieces of money on the turf to pay for his liberal entertainment, Pippa sang her gratitude:

God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world.

These are two lyric moments, if ever there were such, in the essay and poetry.

Stevenson's "lurking curiosity as to Father Michael's past" reminds one by contrast of the pathetic and heroic silence in Alice Meynell's poem, "San Lorenzo's Mother" when she says:

I had not seen my son's dear face
(He chose the cloister by God's grace)
Since it had to full flower-time.

If to my son my alms were given
I know not, and I wait for Heaven.

The comparison of the familiar essay with lyric poetry can be rather appropriately concluded with a parallel between "A Musical Instrument" by Elizabeth Browning and "Pan's Pipes," by Stevenson. The world is joyous, buoyant, almost boisterous in both. The strange, wild music of Pan's pipes sounds through them.

Blinding sweet, O great god, Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,
And the lilies revived and the dragon-fly
Came back to dream on the river.

Stevenson supplies the same details of setting, "For it is a shaggy world, and yet studded with gardens where the salt and tumbling sea receives clear rivers running from among reeds and lilies." The spirit of the thing carries one on as the poet continues:

Yet half a beast is the great god, Pan,
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of man:

or, as Stevenson says, "We come back to the old myth, and hear the goat-footed piper making the music which is itself the charm and terror of things." Whatever the reader's opinion of Pan may be, he must admit that the spirit of the poem and the essay on the satyr-god are in mutual accord, and that the matter of prose or poetry is incidental.

Thus far the comparison of the literary essay with poetry has included a goodly number of representative poets and poems in English literature. That, in itself, would mean a very considerable addition to the student's literary education. Nor is the comparison we have made by any means exhaustive; the subject has in itself material for a study much more extensive. But because poetry and the essay are the two subjects that ordinarily appeal least to young students it is well to be able to correlate the two and to show how each meets the other on common ground of thought and feeling.

The familiar essay can claim and prove no essential relation to the drama, but supplies

some personal criticism of it which is very interesting. Biographies of Lamb and his own essays show him to have been a devotee of the theater and a personal friend of some of the best actors of his day. His critical essay on particular dramatists, notably the Elizabethans, are of interest and value. His familiar writings meet the reader on his own level and give the drama of a half century ago, lacking the scenic effects of to-day, an interest that no number of texts on the subject can furnish. The essay on "Some Old Actors" convinces the student that not only the play but the players are to be considered in a broad study of the drama, and that interest in stage folk is as old as their profession. "My First Play" is an experience that every student is able and glad to imitate. "Stage Illusion" is interesting and valuable in its nice distinction between the character in real life and the character upon the stage. It may also be regarded as furnishing some supplementary advice to Hamlet's "Speak the speech, I pray you," and in this

aspect suggests interesting comparison. "Ellistoniana" speaks of the fading of a nineteenth century theatrical star and gives one a liberal look into that mysterious place, the private life of a famous actor. It also impresses one with the debt that the dramatist owes to the great actor and the part he has in creating a character. The contributions of the familiar essay to the drama are small in quantity, but in personal interest and character are such as no other literary form supplies.

Students of the short story are familiar with the common beginnings of this most popular form of fiction and the essay. Their history is practically one to the time of the *De Coverly Papers,* from which each drew its own inspiration. The tale and the sketch, untechnical forms of the short story, still bear striking resemblance to the personal essay. The debt of the short story proper is acknowledged in the survival of the short story essay. The narrative qualities in the personal essay have already been noted in connection with narration; there

remains now only the task of showing closer relations between particular essays and stories or short story possibilities in certain essays. These are the two ways in which the essay can best be used in the teaching of the short story. From these points of view Lamb's "Mackery End in Hertfordshire" is thoroughly interesting. In spite of the fact that it is quite devoid of plot, it reads like a story and, with a little dexterity on the part of the student, could be made into one. For instance, one might write such a story as "A Romance at Mackery End." "Rejoicing on the New Year's Coming of Age" is a personified and very animated calendar which suggests any number of charming stories for children. "Dream Children" has two very close story kinsmen—"They," by Kipling, and "A Letter and a Paragraph" by Bunner. All three are stories of children, and all three are stories of dream children. Kipling's is the most elusive and possibly the most interesting of the three. Bunner has supplied a plot for Lamb's reverie and obtained from

the combination the most unusual of surprise stories. A paper on this trilogy makes a very good study for a class or for any individual of a class in the short story.

Stevenson, who knows so well the physiology of fiction, could hardly help embodying some of its elements in his essays. Any of the chapters from "Our Lady of the Snows" suggests stories of the type of Phyllis Bottome's "Brother Leo" [4] or a comparison with it. An amateur would hardly be able to succeed with this material, which would require artistic handling, but at least he could recognize the fictional possibilities in it. "A Camp in the Dark" is better suited to the experience and taste of the ordinary student. The suspicious and cowardly peasant and his warm-hearted countryman are characters such as one meets in Maupassant's "Piece of String," while Stevenson's experiences in inhospitality furnish material for a real adventure story. "Child's

[4] Phyllis Bottome, "Brother Leo," *Century Magazine*. June, 1918.

Play" immediately reminds one of any number of personal experiences out of which charming stories could be made. Kipling had no more foundation than this for "The Story of Muhammid Din" and "Ba, Ba, Black Sheep," to mention only two of numerous stories of children embodying the philosophy of childhood as Stevenson expresses it.

Whereas the familiar essay does not furnish so much illustrative material for the drama and the short story, what examples it does supply are to the point. Naturally, too, it is not so well adapted to some aspects or forms of writing as to others. Nor, except in the study of the essay proper, should it ever do more than supplement the subject in hand. It can not be used as a textbook nor instead of one, neither should it take the place of the regular reference work. But it can be made matter of something besides required reading, and will contribute an exceedingly profitable element of variety to class work.

Although our illustrations have been taken

from authors commonly accepted as classic, any of the contemporary writers of the familiar essay may be used in the same way. In fact, if there is any form of contemporary literature that deserves the student's special attention, it is the essay. It is also rather significant that while the last ten years have produced only a handful of great short stories, and have witnessed the decline of the best exponents of this form, notably Kipling, they have given the public an array of essays which are not only the best of current work, but which compare favorably with the best in literature. Spalding, Chesterton, Belloc, John Ayscough, Agnes Repplier, Christopher Morley, and Samuel Crothers are some of our recent essayists whose work is sure to survive. Neither teacher nor student can watch the growth of literature without being acquainted with the contemporary essay. And it is admirably adapted to classroom use. "The Honorable Points of Ignorance" [5] by Crothers, for in-

[5] S. M. Crothers, *The Gentle Reader.*

stance, can be read by or to a class with fine effect in connection with the study of any classic for the purpose of approaching the subject in an amiable attitude of mind. "The Enjoyment of Poetry," and "That History Should Be Readable," by the same author, describe and classify themselves sufficiently by their titles to indicate their possible uses.

Among current publications the *Atlantic Monthly* has kept up the fine tradition, and for that reason, perhaps, regards the essay as its special inheritance. Apart from the body of the magazine where the essay proper appears, it has that delightful section, "The Contributor's Club," where the familiar essay masquerades, sometimes in cap and bells, but always in holiday attire. The student will find himself more at home here than in "An Apology for Idlers," and may even aspire to join the company of contributors. He will be sure to have a word to say on such subjects as "In a Train with Lamb," "The Responsibilities of the Irresponsible" or "Asylums for the Hopelessly

Sane." "Fletcherizing in Literature" [6] reviews for him in a less classical way the prescriptions of Bacon in his essay "Of Studies." If he wants to see his compositions as his teacher sees them, he can get a fine bird's-eye view in "The Gentle Theme Reader," while his own case is gallantly defended in "The Ungentle Theme-writer." [7]

If the student is to become an essay reader, he will probably begin here. He will, of course, be attracted first by the subject-matter; gradually his indifference to the essay will change to an interest in it, and he will find real pleasure in good, substantial thought well expressed. To go so far in forming correct and elevated taste in reading is to have acquired a healthy appreciation of literature.

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[6] *The Atlantic Monthly,* September, 1914; October, 1915; September, 1914; February, 1918.
[7] *The Atlantic Monthly,* May, 1917; August, 1917.

THE END

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